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THE LONDON
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THE LONDON MYSTERY SELECTION

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THE LONDON MYSTERY SELECTION

Life today has moved into the grim world of horror in which any one of us may become intimately concerned.

Innocent air travellers, flying between capital cities, have lately experienced an unwelcome cliff hanging thriller in serial form through the Arab guerilla hijacking of international aircraft, the holding to ransom of hundreds of passengers, men, women and children, and the wanton destruction of multi million pound aircraft, for no obvious purpose other than a half witted, childish desire to watch a costly bonfire.

The old time pirates had some code of honour. They took great risks with their own lives. They were professionals flying the Jolly Roger, and their objective was wealth. Sailors bravely took the risk of being attacked, well knowing that this was a hazard to be expected.

The kidnapping of Embassy officials and politicians to hold Governments to ransom with threats of sufficient intimidation to guarantee capitulation, makes us all feel that at any moment each one of us, peace loving citizens, may well be an important character in an unanticipated thriller mystery . . . not a pleasant thought.

A creaking floorboard, at home in the dead of the night, could send an ordinary citizen stiff with fear. Despite all this, in the security, such as it is, of your home, we hope you and your friends will enjoy the chilling fiction contained in this issue of LONDON MYSTERY.

The Editor

“I’ve always wanted to be a dress designer. I used to do all my own clothes before the accident. Sometimes now I look at the fashions and I know I could do just as well. If I had my hands.”

(Sheila, 18)

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THE BRITISH COUNCIL FOR REHABILITATION OF THE DISABLED

SHADOW FROM HIS PAST

BRIAN WALKER

*Her discarded dress lay on the floor, and in
her chair squatted a . . .*

MAX DANVERS sat in his study, a room as cold and bleak as his own personality. All four walls were lined with books, some comparatively new, others ancient with their leather bindings in the last stages of decay.

These rotting volumes provided Max with the closest thing to happiness he was able to achieve. All other luxuries—wine, good food, women—he took cheerlessly, regarding them more as necessary chores than pleasures. But here, amongst the dark records of the past, the legends and superstitions, the lurid details of primitive rites practised by those who sought to attain wealth through pacts with the devil, his mental climate rose to a few degrees above zero and he was content.

There was a knock on the door. Max looked up, irritated. He had deliberately chosen a flat on the top floor in order to discourage visitors. He disliked company, resented it when acquaintances who regarded themselves as friends came and wasted his valuable time with dreary, fruitless conversations. Afterwards, he would stride about the room, wasting still more time in savage cursing. And it wasn't good for Max to lose his temper. His heart, though flinty, was also weak.

He opened the door and the smile dropped from his face.

"Good evening, Max," said the girl. "What an atrocious elevator you have. I thought I'd never get here. Why, what's the matter? Aren't you glad to see me?"

She was a brunette, tastefully dressed and carrying a large black handbag. She was also very attractive, but Max didn't seem to be appreciating that fact right now. Quite the opposite. His hatchet-like face had acquired a nervous twitch from somewhere and his hand trembled on the door-knob.

After about ten seconds he found his voice. "Marie," he

whispered.

She smiled. "Oh, I'm so glad. For a moment I thought you didn't recognise me. Aren't you going to invite me in? This is a very nice landing but it's beginning to pall on me." She spoke with a pronounced French accent. Her voice was pleasant, but had a slight edge to it. Obviously, Max's apprehensions were well-founded.

"Yes, come in," he croaked, stepping to one side. She walked past him into the sitting room. "Very nice, Max," she said, looking round at the expensive furniture and lavish drapes. "But then, you always did believe in indulging yourself, didn't you?" She sat down and glanced across the room at him. "Max, are you all right?"

Max was definitely not all right. He closed the door and stood facing her, his hands fluttering like nervous butterflies.

He had not seen Marie for three years. Their acquaintance had been brief and, for her, painful.

They had met whilst Max was visiting a small village in Provence, investigating a strange cult that had existed in the seventeenth century. Its members, for reasons best known to themselves, became transformed into frogs at certain times of the year—a ridiculous legend, but Max was too dedicated in his quest after the unusual and macabre to leave any stone unturned. However, the French spring had entered even his frigid veins and when Marie, the daughter of a local farmer, fell in love with him (this event was, in itself, as incredible as any legend) he took full advantage of the situation.

His departure, once his researches were completed, had been both furtive and rapid. He had never thought of Marie since, never considered for a moment the possibility of her tracking him down.

Until now . . .

With an effort, he pulled himself together. "Can I offer you a drink?" he asked, trying to sound as impersonal as possible.

"Yes please, Max. A small whisky. With soda."

"Thank you," she said, taking the glass. "Cheers."

"Cheers," he grunted, taking a large gulp and praying that it

wouldn't go down the wrong way, thereby shattering the last remnants of his composure. His prayer was answered, and it was the old ice-cold Max who asked: "And now, Marie, what can I do for you?"

Her eyes widened. "Why nothing, Max. Far from it. It's what I can do for you."

"For me? I don't understand."

"You remember you were in our district, about three years ago, investigating that silly frog story?"

"Yes," he replied, wondering what was coming next.

"I have some more information about it. Something I think might interest you."

This time his voice registered frank astonishment. "And you went to all the trouble of finding me, just for that?"

"Of course. Why, did you think I'd come to claim some dreadful revenge or something?"

"No," he lied. "No, of course not. What is it you want to tell me?"

Marie leaned forward. "Well, a few months after you left . . ." She broke off. "I'm sorry, have you got a cigarette, please? I must have left mine somewhere."

"I think there are some in the study."

"I'm sorry to . . ."

"No trouble." He hurried into the musty little room and scrabbled amongst the papers on the desk until he found his cigarette case. Opening it as he went, he returned to the sitting room.

The case fell from his fingers, the cigarettes scattering over the carpet.

Marie was gone. Her discarded dress lay on the floor and in her chair squatted a toad, green and repulsive, regarding him through glazed, bulging eyes.

Marie heard Max cry out and fall. Emerging from the bathroom, she knelt down beside him, feeling his heart to make sure that he was dead. She then put on her dress and left.

The toad went with her, in the large handbag in which it had come.

"CHRISTMAS PRACTISE"

A. W. BENNETT

Illustrated by Buster

Fred was still crying with fear and pain . . .

"ANOTHER HOAX," Fireman Stiles complained, "and a real fire occurred while we were on our way to the false one. That kiddie could have been burnt to death. Why don't you catch this swine, mate?"

"We do try, you know," Police Constable Shaw said. "It's a hell of a job though. False calls, stolen fire-alarms, smashed phones, and all witnesses can tell us is that it was a tall youth with long hair. They all looked so alike. How can we distinguish one from another, respectable youths and these vandals who won't grow up."

"Well, I'm warning you, mate, if we at the fire-station get hold of him, we'll mark him. You'll be able to recognize him the next time, that I'll guarantee."

"Good. You do just that. But don't say I said so, and don't let us catch you at it either. We have to mollicoddle the wrongdoers now. How I'd like to swipe some of them, but I daren't even think about my truncheon until they've half killed me and my mates."

Fred the Needle handed over the cannabis and pocketed the money.

"I've got some pethidine and methidrine too, tell your contacts," he said. "I'm keeping the morphine for myself."

"Morphine? That's new for you, isn't it, Fred?"

"Yes, but a few days ago I pretended to collapse outside a hospital. They took me in, I told them I had terrible pains in my chest, they gave me morphine and kept me in for two days. During the nights I pinched enough drugs to last me for a while. I discharged myself this morning."

"Good for you, Fred. What are you doing tonight? Knocking off more phone boxes?"

"No. The cops are keeping an eye on them. I've done them so often. Besides, they're being made stronger. I'm going to do the Cushion Old Peoples' Home. Fire-bottles on every landing, I can flog them for a few nicker. I pinched the fire alarms from there three months ago and sold them for scrap. The council wouldn't replace them, the mean skunks, said it would be too expensive. So I'll have to be satisfied with these extinguishers; one on each landing."

"What if there's a fire?"

"Who cares? They're only old people."

"Risky, isn't it? You pinched the money out of the phone box there only a week ago. Smart, that, not much in, but only old dodderers to deal with. I suppose it was you who knocked old Tasker on the head and shoved him down the stairs? They'll have no fire alarms, no extinguishers, no phones; place will be a death trap if there's a fire, and with old crocks that's always likely to happen. What'll you think of next, Fred?"

Fred soaked up the admiration like a sponge. "I had to wallop old Tasker, the fool interfered when I'd got the phone box half open. Don't forget this pethidene and methidrine. It'll be a bit more expensive, remember."

Yes, they'd got to be more expensive. He remembered the hours he'd had to wait last night for a suitable opportunity to slip into the drug-room at the hospital and milk the phials of anaesthetic drugs and partly replace the contents with water. He'd syphoned off morphine, pethidine, methidrine and other drugs, then resealed the phials with colourless glue. Nobody would know until they used those anaesthetics.

The patient would know then, for sure, but the surgeons would go on with the operation, thinking the patient was a cry-baby or squeamish or screaming for mercy just to make it worse seeming than it actually was, in order to persuade the surgeon to stop whatever he was doing.

Fred squirmed at the very thought of what it must be like

for the patient. Tied down, were they? Couldn't move, and knives and needles and rills cutting and pulling and tugging and probing at you, and cauterising. Ugh! And if you yelled too much they'd probably gag you to prevent you upsetting other patients and then carry on gouging at you quicker to get the job over. Fred felt sick with fright at the very thought.

But his exploit had been well worth while. What he'd pinched he'd flog for a nice packet, then do the same thing at another hospital; same as he was doing various Old Peoples Homes at intervals. Dead clever. No danger.

That night as he was carrying the second fire extinguisher down he heard a door open; a woman stared at him and she had a steaming bowl in her hands. A man's face appeared over her shoulder. "That's him," said old Mr. Tasker.

Fred went to slug them both with the extinguisher, but burning oil splashed all over him. The skin seemed to be blazing on his face and neck and belly; his open-neck shirt was scant protection. He tried to scream but the stuff had got down his throat and his mouth felt on fire. Voices yelling round him, people trying to stop him tearing at his eyes. His hands seemed frying too.

"I was only heating some oil to rub my husband's bruises with," Mrs. Tasker explained to the ambulance men.

"Boiling oil is too good for him," somebody answered. Fred couldn't see who. He couldn't see anything.

Hours of hellish torture later, it seemed to Fred, the surgeons at the hospital were ready for him. He heard them muttering together, but didn't hear the words. "Chance here to practise our dramatic ability in preparation for the Christmas concert in the wards. We want to put on a good show for the patients. Let's see what sort of actors we are—and actresses."

Fred was still crying with fear and pain when they wheeled him toward the operating table. "We'll give him a shot of pethidene before we take him in," a voice near him said. "Then the anaesthetic when we've got him on the table. He'll need plenty. First degree burns can be a devil to treat. We'll have to take most of his skin off."



Fred screamed again. He wanted to tell them that the drugs were useless, watered down. His lips and tongue were out of action.

"We'll take some flesh from his thighs for manipulative surgery on his nose and cheeks, but it won't be very effective, I'm afraid," another voice sighed.

Fred tried again to make himself understood. "Delirious," said a voice. "Trying to say something about drugs. Does he think we don't know how to use them. Perhaps he's afraid of anaesthetics; some people are. He'd be in for a hell of a time for the next three hours if we hadn't got the proper anaesthetics to ease him. Even so he'll be scarred for life. Face like a gargoyle. That burning oil that got down to his belly didn't do him much good either. He'll never be the same man again."

"Ah, you're right," somebody answered. "Conspicuous, he'll be. The sort of face that will stick out a mile in a million."

Fred felt the prick of the needle but no relief. How could he, with the weak mixture he'd left. Oh, to recall that past misdeed that seemed so clever at the time. They wheeled him in. He knew he was in for it.

Aeons later Fred found himself in bed, swathed like a mummy. He howled like a baby when he found his hands were covered with bandages, he wanted to feel his face and eyes. Hands firmly grasped his and tucked them inside the sheets.

"Lie still," commanded a deep voice. "I'm P.C. Shaw, stationed at your bedside until the Super can take your depositions. Don't worry, you'll be well looked after—by Nurse Tasker. She's had plenty of practice nursing her father in her spare time, so if she's a bit tired or hasty you'll understand. They tell me if the bandages and dressings are torn off hurriedly it takes most of the skin off as well. I'll leave you now, I can't stand hearing people screaming in pain, Nurse Tasker is coming, and don't try to struggle, she's got a huge male nurse with her—with a needle in his hand. Gosh, it's as big as a sword. Now, now, no use weeping any more."

P.C. Shaw strolled into the corridor, where a grinning young doctor in a white coat stood waiting.

"How bad is he, under all those bandages, doctor?"

"He'll be okay soon. Not much wrong with him; that oil wasn't really boiling. We spotted the disturbed phials earlier and changed them. His fingerprints are on them, the Super has them now. We gave him genuine anaesthetics and normal treatment, of course. His nerves and guilty conscience did the rest. Our conversation was merely for dramatic effect; practicing our dialogue for the Christmas play. By the way, he'll be easy to identify in future, we shan't be able to eradicate all the marks. Why are you grinning?"

"I'm thinking of what Fireman Stiles will say. By-the-way, what's the name of your Christmas play?"

"Nemesis."



"A GROWING MENACE"

DOROTHY B. BENNETT

*He could feel a choking sensation whenever
he lay down in the dark*

"WE usually have a session telling ghost stories about this time each Christmas Eve," chubby little Mike Inman said. He owned the guest house, and liked to see his visitors enjoying themselves. "Then nuts and wine, and dancing for those who still feel active enough. You frown, though, Doctor Beatrice. I suppose you don't believe in ghosts or hauntings? In your profession you must have to stick to cold facts, the severely practical and provable. No time for other-worldly phenomena?"

"If I frowned it was because you mentioned dancing, and your excellent dinner has left me little inclination to indulge in exercise. As for hauntings, well . . .?"

There was a note of doubt in her voice. Doctor Beatrice was elderly, plump, with bright kindly eyes and a warm smile. It was easy to understand why her many patients idolised her.

Mrs Inman, eager to get the guests in a party spirit, prompted her.

"I suppose, Doctor, you've had a lot of experience of life and death. Do you believe in a hereafter—or in ghosts and hobgoblins?"

The doctor considered. "I don't know about a hereafter. Not even about ghosts. But those who are dead can sometimes influence those who live; sometimes in the most strange ways. I had one case . . ."

She paused for a long time. One of the guests said: "Go on, please. Don't leave us in suspense—unless it's against medical etiquette."

"No, it isn't that. It's merely that there is no end to the story. No logical explanation. I'll alter the names, and you can judge for yourselves."

The wind was howling outside and we could hear the roar

of the surf against the rocks, but inside it was cosy and warm. The guests drew closer. Those who had been standing about drew chairs up to the circle about the fire. The youngsters were playing in another room. Mrs Inman tiptoed to the switches and put out the overhead lights and left us dim-lit by wall-lights.

Dr Beatrice patted her grey hair into place. "It's a foolish story," she apologised. "It concerns secondhand-clothing; as mundane as that. Does it have a power—a power to carry on, to transmit, the aura, the personality, of the previous owner? I don't know. You shall judge. I hope to find out when I reach the other side. The plain facts are that a Mr Philip Trent came to my surgery, as a private patient. I'd never seen him before, he'd only recently come to live in the district. He was hatless, wore flannels and a brown polo-necked pullover and a sports coat. Thirty or so, tall, thick-set, full-blooded. He complained of a feeling of constriction in his throat. I examined him, could find nothing wrong, gave him a harmless soothing prescription.

"A week later he returned, said it was worse. He looked pale and scared. Said he could feel a choking sensation whenever he lay down in the dark. It repeatedly woke him and he was getting no sleep. I judged it was caused by some inflammation which became more pronounced in the lying down position. I sent him to a throat specialist, who reported that there was nothing whatever wrong with the man's throat.

"Trent visited me a month later and I was shocked. He'd lost a stone in weight and was haggard. I asked him to strip to the waist, I wanted to make tests; I suspected anaemia. He refused. Shy of even partially disrobing before a woman doctor, I guessed. I suggested he consult a male doctor. He said he'd been to one, who was fool enough to tell him—Trent—that he was imagining it, whereas I did show some semblance of believing him and trying to cure him; at least I was sympathetic, he sensed. He asked me if I could put him in touch with a witch-doctor. I laughed at him—may God forgive me.

"I had him X-rayed. Quite clear. I sent him to a psychoanalyst, who was completely puzzled, said Trent was carrying

a heavy mental burden, but kept it locked within himself; maybe something he was ashamed about. Trent was desperately afraid and had unburdened himself only so far as to say that he felt himself 'possessed'.

"By an evil spirit, do you mean?" queried Daniels, the analyst.

"No," answered Trent hoarsely. That was a new symptom, hoarseness, huskiness, and I could find nothing to account for it, there was no vestige of inflammation of throat or larynx. "He was not evil in life. The evil was in me—and now he is in me and on me. Part of me."

"Then he shut up like a clam. He came to my surgery again and pleaded despairingly that I help him, he could feel 'the fingers of fate' at his throat night and day and it was getting worse. I persuaded a noted hypnotist to come and see him at my house, without telling Trent who the visitor was. I was getting very disturbed about my patient.

"Professor Whelan—I am using imaginary names, you understand—always said that the more intelligent a person was, the easier he could get him 'under control'. After a few questions by the Professor, the sitting developed into an informal chat, with me gradually fading out of the discussion and leaving those two to it. Gradually only Trent was talking, and he told his story. He was fully under the control of Whelan, but talked mainly to me. This is what he had to say."

"I sailed round the world in a small boat years before these others did it, and without any of their fuss and publicity. Paul Catelon and I, in a little boat we called Daisy. We'd been pals for years, each an orphan alone in the world. Almost like blood-brothers. We hadn't much experience, it was a fool-hardy attempt, but we tried it just for the hell of it. But we got fed up with each other's constant company. We were irritable, forever in each other's pocket, no privacy, blaming each other for coming, for our shortages. We were becalmed, moving not a mile for days, short of food, worse still, short of water. We had come away ill-prepared. A gull settled on the boat, Paul went for it—we would have eaten anything—he

missed it, stumbling in his weakness. I cursed him, he came for me, we fought, I strangled him. His body lay at the bottom of the boat all day.

"A gentle breeze developed and I got under way, the first movement for days. The breeze got stronger and cooler as darkness fell. I took off his polo-necked sweater—this one—and put it on myself, after taking off my own thin open-neck shirt and putting it on him. I don't know why. It couldn't keep him warm. Round his neck he wore a gold chain with a round gold medallion on which was raised two hands clasping each other. A symbol of 'Hands Across the Sea'. Paul was French. I'd given it to him one day when I was in the money. In token of what I thought would be our undying friendship. I left chain and medallion on him and thrust him over the side of the boat. Remorse was tearing me to pieces. That, of course, was the last I saw of Paul. Undoubtedly the sharks had him.

"Stubbornly I continued the journey and eventually did get right round the world. I landed at a desolate spot in Wales. No publicity for me. I'd worn the polo-necked sweater continuously, rain or fine, although I'd felt an itch, a tingle. It had been part of him and was becoming part of me. I'd decided never to part with it so long as it would cling to me in one piece. I think I regarded it as something in the nature of a hair-shirt, a symbol of both punishment and repentance for killing someone who regarded me almost as a blood brother. This way we became brothers of one garment.

"When I landed, I decided to spruce myself up, otherwise I'd be conspicuous, dirty, bearded, dishevelled. I didn't think there would ever be any enquiries about Paul, we hadn't bruited it about that we were making a long trip. Even if his disappearance was ever noticed, there was no proof that I had murdered him, strangled him, throttled him. I could say he'd fallen overboard. No, I wanted to spruce myself up merely because I desired to remain unnoticed. I proposed to strip, wash my clothes in the sea, dry them, dress again and visit a barber."

At this point Philip Trent paused in his story, not for

dramatic effect, but because he'd arrived at a point which had had a great emotional feeling for him. Something seemed to stick in his throat, for he gulped several times before taking a deep breath and starting again.

"I couldn't get the sweater off. I tried to pull it over my head, but it wouldn't come, it seemed to be stuck to me. I'd noticed with amazement through all those weeks what good condition the sweater was in. I'd worn it continuously, without taking it off, sleeping and working in it, yet it hadn't frayed. I'd bathed in the sea in it daily and it still retained its colour. I could understand this when I realised it was growing into me, the wool had penetrated within my skin, had become hair of me, was part of me, was feeding on me. If I pulled it off I should pull off my skin. It was my skin, glossy and brown. Strange though it may seem, I'd got fatter since I killed Paul, in spite of the hardships, privations and semi-starvation. Paul had always been plump, and I skinny. Something of Paul, some essence of him, was in the pullover, and now in me. It was his hair, brown, not mine, which had always been jet black, and it now covered me strongly from neck to below the waist. I was part Paul, somehow he'd survived death via his sweater, and lived on in me.

"I'd no mirror, no scissors. I wanted to cut the material of the sweatet, to see if it hurt, if it would grow again. I went to a barber and there in the mirror saw Paul. Me. I wasn't me, but him. I snipped off a bit of the sweater and it didn't hurt.

Philip Trent faltered, came to a full stop. I saw why. Professor Whelan was white, drained of vitality, almost fainting. The strain of keeping Trent under control for so long was too much for him.

I treated him and he recovered. He was ready to go on, but Trent refused.

"I've told you too much," he said. Then colour rushed into his face. "But having told you that much, help me off with my sweater."

I tried. The Professor tried. It was impossible.

"I've cut it off, shaved it off. It grows again. Part of Paul

growing on me. I'm part Paul, part Philip. Can I have a skin graft? What about my throat? I can feel his hands on my wind-pipe again."

Again? Which was he?

"I gave him a strong sedative and he slept on my couch.

"Professor Whelan said he'd have no further part in the man's treatment and left. I examined Philip Trent/Paul Cartelot and was nonplussed. His torso was hairy as a bear, yet the hair was of a strange texture and fitted loosely like a garment and covered a strictly defined area only, that normally covered by a man's polo-necked sweater.

"A photo fell from his pocket. Two men, same height, same age, one dark, one mousy brown, one thin, one plump. The one on my couch was plump." Which had I here?

"As I watched and wondered he awoke. Panic filled his eyes and I thought he was dying before my eyes. His eyes were staring and protruding like those of a man hanging or strangling. Tongue protruding, face darkening. Ever seen a man who's been garrotted? No, you wouldn't. He said he could feel a thumb pressing on his Adam's Apple. His hands went up to his throat found nothing there and he gave a moan of utter despair. He rose weakly from my couch, opened the door and walked out. Can man transmit his passion through discarded clothes? I'll never know in this life."

Mr Inman rose. "But what happened to him. Was he Philip or Paul? Did you report it to the police?"

Doctor Beatrice shook her grey head gently. "No. Next day he was found dead in the river. A threadbare brown sweater was falling off his body, it disintegrated at a touch. It looked very similar to an old man's greying, lifeless hair. The touch of it made the hair prickle on my scalp, it crumpled so slinkily as it moved. The verdict was accidental death, but neither the coroner nor I could explain why, on his throat where it would be hidden by any polo-necked clothing, there was a mark, almost a stigmata. Deeply indented upon the skin was an impression of two crossed hands—'Hands Across the Sea'. As if some metal medallion had been pressing there."

SUCH LOVELY HAIR

G. M. GREEN

Illustrated by Buster

Her cold gaze did not shift from his as she answered . . .

THE TREES thinned out and the two men came within sight of the end of the wood. The older of the two found a patch of grass and with a cautious look backwards into the shadowy trees, sat down. He breathed heavily and his pale, narrow face was damp with the effort of unaccustomed exercise.

The late August sun, pricking holes through the leaves, lit the second man's fair head as he stood above his companion. "Tired?" he queried mockingly. "You're out of condition, mate. Come on, get a move on, unless you want to be back in your cell by tonight."

"Shut up, Jack," said the other, moving uneasily under the contemptuous blue eyes above him. "Give us a minute to get me breath back anyway."

Jack shrugged irritably, but sat down, rubbed a muscular forearm over his dusty face and taking a small comb from the pocket of his white shorts, carefully tidied his hair.

Bill watched him with grudging admiration. No doubt about it, Jack was smart. It had been his idea to escape on the day of the prison sports, dressed only in singlet and shorts. In a sport-conscious country like England, no-one had given a second glance at the two earnest figures, jogging doggedly along on a 'practice' run, and once clear of the town, they had struck across country and effaced themselves in the thick woods, which ran for several miles in an almost unbroken line.

Only now their absence would surely have been discovered

at the prison and it was essential that they had clothes. Bill shivered. The excitement of the day was wearing thin, and safety was still a long way ahead.

"Let's get moving," urged Jack, jumping to his feet, "It's almost sunset." He strode ahead, while Bill got up stiffly, rubbing his bony knees to ease the tiredness.

Fifty yards further on, the trees ceased suddenly and the two men faced a large field, sloping away to a winding country lane, bordered by high hedges. Jack smiled. The roof of a small cottage was just visible on the far side of the road, half-screened by five tall trees.

He looked towards the sinking sun. "We'll wait here until it's a bit darker, then make for that cottage. It seems to be the only one round here."

They waited, crouching on the grass, until the red faded from the sky, then moved swiftly down the field to the road. Keeping within the hedge, they followed the road until they were level with the cottage. "Let's hope the old man, if there



is one, is enjoying his pint in the village pub," grinned Jack. "Come on, we can get through the hedge here."

They crossed the road and let themselves quietly into the small garden. A light shone dimly through the drawn curtains of the downstairs window but the rest of the house was in darkness.

Jack crouched under the window, listening. "I can't hear anyone talking—I'm going in." Bill caught his companion's arm. "Wait a minute," he whispered, "Why not wait 'till they are in bed?" "Don't be a fool," said Jack, shaking off the restraining hand. "We haven't that much time. You afraid I'll rough them up?" He grinned, flexing his powerful arms.

Bill watched him anxiously. Jack's speciality was "robbery with violence". Bill was afraid of violence. He still sweated when he remembered the job that had landed him in the same prison as Jack. The stolen car, the moment of panic when a policeman tried to stop him, and the crumpled figure lying, badly injured in the roadway.

Now he hung back as Jack wrenched open the cottage door and stood large and menacing, outlined by the light from inside the house.

The elderly woman sitting reading, turned quickly towards the door, but she did not rise from her seat. Her deep-set eyes took in the threatening figure and searched out Bill, half-hidden behind. "What do you want here?" she asked in a low voice.

Jack motioned Bill inside and closed the door. "You alone?" he asked roughly. Her cold gaze did not shift from his face as she answered, "Yes." "We want clothes, food and some cash," said Jack. "Give us those and we'll be on our way."

The woman's eyes moved momentarily and her hand briefly indicated the table, set with bread and cheese and the remains of a supper. Jack cut a rough slice of bread and a hunk of cheese and began to eat, motioning Bill to do the same. "Anything to drink?" he asked. The woman nodded towards an old Welsh dresser. "Cider," she answered. Jack poured a generous measure, drank it down and refilled his glass.

"Who else lives here?" he queried, giving the woman a sharp glance. "My son . . . he's out." Her gaze had hardly shifted from Jack's face since he entered the room. "Well, get us some clothes, quick," he snapped, feeling uncomfortable under her stare. "Bill, you go with her . . ." "What's that noise?" whispered Bill, suddenly.

For the first time the woman looked uneasy, as a confused murmuring sounded overhead.

Jack caught the woman's arm roughly. "You said there was no one else in the house," he snarled. "Who is upstairs?"

"It's only the old dog," said the woman, "He snores in his sleep. Wait here—I'll get you the clothes." She made for the door leading to the stairs but Jack was before her, running cat-footed up the narrow treads. Bill stopped the woman as she made to follow. "Better stay here, missus," he advised, "It doesn't do to cross Jack."

"You look less of a ruffian," said the woman, turning her strange eyes on Bill. "See that he doesn't harm my son."

At that moment Jack re-appeared, dragging with him a tall, shambling young man of about eighteen, whose vacant eyes and trembling limbs told their own tale. "Leave him alone," cried the woman, "*he* can't hurt you." Jack flung the youth roughly into a chair, barring the woman's way as she tried to reach her son's side. "Come on, ma," he ordered, "find some money. Bill, upstairs and find some clothes."

As Bill disappeared up the stairs, the youth suddenly came to life. He picked up the heavy cider jug from the dresser and flung it at Jack. His aim was inexpert, but the jug caught Jack a glancing blow on his forehead and cider splashed down his neck and shoulder.

Jack turned furiously towards the boy. His clenched fist hit him full in the face and he fell sprawling.

"Steady on, Jack," shouted Bill, coming into the room carrying sweaters, corduroy trousers and an ancient pair of grey flannels. "Get dressed and let's get out of here."

The woman was staring down at the still figure on the floor. "You've killed him!" she whispered. "Don't talk rubbish,"

shouted Jack, "but I'll give him a real work-over if you don't get that money, quick!"

Her eyes still on her son, the woman fumbled in a drawer and took out a purse. "That's more like it," said Jack, snatching the purse from her hand and counting out its contents. "£4 and some silver. Not much but it will help. Now Bill—the clothes."

A few minutes later they were ready to go. "Find me some rope somewhere," Jack ordered Bill. "I'm not leaving these two loose." Bill searched round in the small kitchen and found a length of washing line. "That'll do," said Jack. "You tie the woman—I'll see to the boy," and he hoisted the still unconscious youth onto a chair and swiftly tied him hand and foot, pulling the rope tight.

"That should hold them for a bit," he said, standing back satisfied. He took out his comb and carefully combed his hair, catching his reflection in the glass of a picture on the wall. He cursed when the comb snapped in his hand and he threw the pieces disgustedly on the table . . .

Three weeks later in the cottage, the woman sat in the same chair, reading a newspaper. Her finger followed the lines as she read:

"Jack Hart, who escaped from prison three weeks ago, was today found dead in bed in a Hammersmith house. His neck was marked with a thin red line and he appeared to have died from strangulation, though there was no evidence of a struggle and the door of his room was locked on the inside. William Sherman, who escaped with Hart, was recaptured more than a week ago."

The woman pushed aside the paper and picked up from the table a small, roughly carved wooden doll and a broken comb.

Wound tightly round the doll's neck was a single blond hair. Her fingers gently pulled another loose hair from the piece of comb. "Such lovely hair he had," she murmured, "so strong."

She laughed, a short, brittle sound. Then she flung the doll into the heart of the fire.

SCREAM AT THE NIGHT

LOUIS ALLEGRI

She reached towards the bottle of sleeping pills . . .

HER HUSBAND hadn't been gone long when the telephone rang in their large drawing-room. She whimpered and held a hand to her throat. Soon she would go mad. Such a cruel game to play. She stood up, pulling her dressing gown tightly around her slim figure, her tired eyes pleading for the hateful instrument to cease its shrill clamour.

Her nerves were wretched as it was, with her husband pretending. Always pretending and yet, knowing she didn't believe his excuses when he went out on his nightly debauches. "Late at the office, darling," he would smile, or "Met an old army friend, sweet." He must have enjoyed her desperate efforts to believe him, she knew that now. And lately, he had laughed so cynically whenever she questioned him. "Mustn't interrogate your hubby, Carla," he would say. "If you don't trust me any more, why don't you go away?" Apart from the income from a small trust fund, the beautiful house and its contents were all she had left, as the remainder of her capital that had been dissipated since her marriage three years earlier.

At long last the telephone became silent. She heaved a deep, anxious sigh but then stifled a scream as it started again; searing her shattered nerves and flooding through the house like some wailing banshee. "Oh dear God," she heard her own shocked voice, and then, not knowing how she got there, found herself gripping the edge of the small table with one hand and fumbling for the pale blue receiver with the other . . . The voice was like a cat's purr.

"Hullo, darling. You were a long time answering. What's the matter, honey? I thought you were giving me the brush off . . ."

"Go away . . . Please leave me alone," she begged. "Why are you doing this terrible thing to me?"

She shuddered at his quiet laughter. "I want you, darling. Have done ever since you forgot to close your curtains one night . . . I'm not far away. Aren't you lonely? I am. I know your hubby stays out all hours."

She dropped the receiver from her trembling hand, and after watching it swing to and fro over the edge of the table for a few dazed moments, hurried upstairs to dose herself with tranquillisers . . .

What was happening to her? She lay on the bed, her nerves screaming, and bit her lip until the blood flowed. She had tried desperately hard to be a good wife. Loved her husband so very much, and until recently, had been blissfully happy.

After their marriage, life had been one round of pleasure, and when money became short, she began selling some of the contents of the house. But this had to stop. Before this they had travelled to so many wonderful places in the world. He had been so charming and kind. Then it had started, and now the same old excuses made her head ring. At first she had stifled her suspicions, even when a friend had told her about the woman she had seen with her husband at a night club. She knew better now. He had almost driven her from the house, but somehow she still managed to hold on stubbornly to what was hers.

Then those telephone calls started and now her courage was at its last ebb. For two weeks the man had been invading her privacy with his quiet, obscene voice. Her husband had merely shrugged when she told him about the terrible caller, and the police hadn't been able to help as her tormentor was clever enough to ring off before they had time to trace the call.

The following day seemed even more harrowing than usual as she tried to penetrate the emotional web that now shrouded her mind and made lucid thought difficult. He had got into bed early that morning, and his head had barely touched the pillow before he entered a noisy, drink-sodden sleep. She had made breakfast automatically, and little was said before he left for the small property company in which he was a director.

Yet, when the time neared for his return, a strange sort of

fever overcame her. It was as if the residue of the previous happiness she had experienced flooded through her, forcing recent memories into oblivion. She made herself as beautiful as possible. Her reddish hair had lost some of its sheen and she couldn't completely hide the tired lines on her face, but she was surely still attractive, she thought. Perhaps there were faults and deficiencies in herself she hadn't been aware of? Yes. She would talk to him. Ask him about them. Oh, God! That must be it . . .!

He didn't look too happy when he arrived that evening, and merely raised his eyebrows when he saw the small table laid for dinner, the lights from the candles were reflected sharply in the two gleaming, silver candlesticks. It was his business, she thought. Things hadn't been going too well for him. Well, tonight she would offer him everything she owned.

Her strange happiness was almost feverish as he went upstairs to change. She waited nervously for a short while, trying to think of the right words to use, then, unable to contain herself any longer, went upstairs to their bedroom. He was dressed ready for dinner, and was seated on the edge of the bed with the remains of a glass of Scotch on the small bedside table.

Her voice was soft when she sat next to him, and in a confused way pleaded that they should both make a fresh start. He did look handsome in his evening clothes.

"Fresh start!" he smiled widely. "But there's nothing fresh about you at all, dear Carla . . .!"

She shuddered, and then, refusing to understand his words, threw her arms around him. She staggered and sat on the floor as he pushed her away. Still refusing to believe it was real and not a nightmare, she stood pleading in front of him when he tried to leave. In a rage, he hit her, causing her brain to explode into a thousand lights. "You make me sick," she heard him say through the thunderous roar in her head. "After three years with you I've earned this," he jerked his head at the room. "Now why don't you be a good girl and get out. You'll have to eventually, I promise you." His next words made her

reel with horror . . .

* * *

She must have been sitting there for hours, later that night; just staring at the small table she had prepared for dinner. The candles had burned out. No tears would come now. She felt dried up inside. She would have given him all she possessed that night, had he really shown any feeling for her. But it was hopeless. It had been hopeless all along, that was obvious now . . . She reached towards the bottle of sleeping pills and then clenched her fist in mid-air . . . How could people be so terribly cruel? She shivered and let it ring . . .

The telephone kept ringing and ringing until the house seemed to reverberate with the jarring clamour. She got up and raised the receiver. "Hullo, darling. Back again. How's about you and me . . .?"

"Yes . . . Come on then," her voice was seductive. "You know my house. Come along—darling. I—I'm sick of being left alone . . ."

"Huh . . . ? What are you up to, sweetie . . . ? Trying to net your distant lover? Hmm . . . ?"

"Don't be silly. You've been wanting to meet me, well, now is your chance. You might not get another. I've had a terrible argument with my husband. He's an unfaithful monster who beats me. I'll be alone here all night and that's the truth, so it's up to you. But, of course, if you're afraid. Just a talker. Just—just a big noise at the end of the line, well . . ."

There was a long silence and then: "Listen, sweet. I'm coming all right . . . I'm coming. But if there's any funny business, well, you won't be beautiful any longer. Someone else will do it for me if I can't. Get it?"

"Oh, come on. Don't be such a scared rabbit! I'll be waiting for you . . ."

She saw him lurking around outside ten minutes later, and eventually, he went around the back and knocked on the door. He was tall, with bright blue eyes and a strained smile that

deeply creased his face. "Well, this is cosy," he said as he tentatively entered the room. She poured him a Scotch and patted the divan. "Sit down. Don't look so worried . . ."

"Come on now, what's the catch?" he looked around suspiciously.

"You are a nervous one. Good looking too." She sat beside him. "Well, you've no need to worry. You see, I know my husband put you up to this. He lost his temper and told me tonight. I want to get my own back—see?" She leaned over and kissed him. He grinned and seemed much more relaxed.

"Say, I've heard of you rich dames. Frustrated. Maybe there's something in it." He studied his drink and then exchanged it for hers. After swallowing the Scotch he reached upwards.

"No . . ."

"What do you mean, no?"

"I mean not here. Let's go upstairs."

"Up—? Well, sure!" he raised his pale eyebrows and chuckled. "Anything you say, sweetie . . ."

He squeezed her waist as they walked up the wide, sweeping staircase that led directly from the drawing room, and when they entered the pastel blue bedroom, she gently coerced him to sit on the bed at the far end. Then, after glancing unobtrusively at her watch, began delving into the large wardrobe and eventually selected a flimsy negligee which she threw on to the bed with a smile.

"I don't expect my husband back tonight," she said as she reached the door, "but just in case, I had better lock the front door—"

By the time he was half way down the stairs after her, she was already standing by the open front door, screaming . . . Such terrible screams, yet, she felt as cold as ice inside . . .

The constable on his beat tackled him as he brushed past her and ran up the street, and then dragged him back to the house. Her dress was torn and she kept screaming: "He killed my husband! Oh God! The paper knife . . . in the study . . . My poor husband . . . dead . . ."

Toni and her brother Timothy seek peace and quiet amongst the Isles of Greece, but as with Ulysses, the ancient gods decree otherwise.

No Polyphemus, no Sirens, but Tommy guns and villainous looking Asiatics, and a fugitive; in the modern vein. For Timothy's sake she does not wish to be involved.

And what does involvement mean?

Some squalid affair of drug trafficking?

Smuggling out of Greece of a valuable classic urn?

Toni resolves her dilemma in a truly feminine way.

She takes the weaker side, though, indeed, from a moral point of view, neither side appears to have much to recommend it.

Her decision commits her to some daring under-water exploits and even when her strategy has succeeded, she wonders if she has not merely frustrated one group of villains to give aid and comfort to another.

TONI'S ODYSSEY

DERWENT VALE

Illustrations by Vera Jarman

THE UNFORGETTABLE perfumes of trees—turpentine, mastic, lemon, olive, palm—drifted over the sea from Chios, now darkening in the evening light over their port beam. The sea, mirror smooth, was slowly turning from steel-blue to a muted grey. Toni and Timothy, in denims and gay coloured shirts and tanned by the sun and sea, looked like a couple of young Greek scallywags on a fishing spree as they lay on their stomachs in the stern of the little cabin cruiser they had hired a month ago in Rhodes. They kicked their heels up and down like children and stared nostalgically to the south, where the Isles of the Dodecanese lay over the fading horizon.

It was all over—their little Odyssey for two amongst the Isles of Greece, part of Timothy's recuperation, ordered by the neurologist-surgeon of New York, who had successfully operated on Timothy's crippled spine some months ago. Dr. Slesinger had been emphatic: "The Isles of Greece for one whole month, son. Sun and sea and plenty of 'em," and he had winked at Toni and added, "You'll do as his Ulysses, my dear. Steer him clear of the Sirens, you know."

It had indeed been an Odyssey for two—snowy Tairos, brooding over Rhodes, the temple to Aesculapius at Isthmos (Toni whispered a prayer of thanksgiving in the ruins). Palmos where St. John had been revealed the Apocalypse, pink, white and blue under the Mediterranean sky, Lesbos, home of Sappho, the wines of Samos, white triangular sails against the golden coasts, a girl on the Haghios Louka road on Chios with the nose and brow of Praxiteles' Aphrodite of Cnidus. Palikari lamb, honey melon, tiny cups of Vary Glyko coffee, and always the beat of the sea and the great arc of the sky to remind them of Odysseus and St. Paul, whose ships had left their wakes in this same sea and on whom the same bright sun had gazed day after day like the great golden eye of Zeus.

"South to Rhodes tomorrow, Timothy," said Toni, a trifle sadly. "No more stopping at every and any delectable island."

"No more lotus eating days," replied Timothy, equally wistful, anxious to air a little Greek knowledge—or was it Tennyson?

"'Fraid not," said Toni lazily.

"Maybe we could do another couple of dives in this lovely little bay. What about it, Toni? It's what the doctor ordered, you know."

"Why not? It is what the doctor ordered in moderation so no showing off."

"Showing off! Well really, Toni—"

"After that last dive, so nonchalantly he said, 'Such delightful sea anemones on the rocks, Toni'. Knowing full well the sea bed was all of twenty-five feet below the surface and doctor's orders not more than ten feet," said Toni mock parentally.

They both laughed at Toni's sally, but she felt he mustn't be allowed to think she took his foolhardiness lightly and added, "Not again, Timothy, please."

"I promise," he said penitently. "Silly of me, but it's absolutely marvellous down there. The gentle light and the delicate colours!" Timothy had found a new range of light and shade and colour under the sea to quicken his artistic ego.

"And the fish!" laughed Toni. "They are so inquisitive. They swim towards one, have a good look, then—flick! and they are flashing silver and away!"

"You have never used the gun."

"It would be like shooting robins or skylarks—"

He looked at her quizzically. "I've never known anybody so soft-hearted as you, Toni. I don't believe you would kill a mosquito."

"Oh?" said Toni, looking sideways at him. There was a lot he didn't know about his sister, she thought, which was just as well.

But this indolent carefree exchange no longer interested him. He was staring with lively interest across the bay and following the direction of his gaze, she saw a little fishing boat swinging around the headland, its triangular sail taut in the off-shore breeze.

There was a solitary figure in the blunt bows and she could see he was accoutred for underwater swimming, the air cylinders on his back giving a grotesque humped-back appearance to his silhouette against the setting sun. As they watched he hurled a bulky looking object overboard and followed it immediately.

The little blue and red painted boat sailed on quite imperturbably, not a bubble broke the sea's surface where the diver had vanished. They watched fascinated.

"There's nobody else aboard her!" Timothy exclaimed. "She'll founder on the beach on her present tack."

"He's got the auxiliary on too," said Toni. "He must have been in a hurry, but there surely is somebody else aboard her."

She was wrong. The boat headed for the rocky beach and

ground its way into the stones and boulders with a racketing crunch, clearly audible to both. The triangular sail shuddered and went limp and the boat settled lugubriously on its side.

"And now what?" asked Toni searching the placid waters of the bay for signs of the skin diver, but the sea was as untroubled as the cloudless sky above it.

"We have a problem on our hands," observed Timothy shrewdly. "You know, Toni, I think that odd little incident is only the beginning of some funny business."

"I believe you could be right," Toni agreed thoughtfully, "though heaven forbid we are to be involved. It might be good policy to up-anchor and away." Involvement in any chicanery likely to follow on this very untoward little episode was not included in the doctor's idea of a rest cure for her brother. In Greek waters there were plenty of nefarious comings and goings it would be better to avoid.

But even as Timothy made towards the anchor cable, Toni's forebodings were dramatically justified, for a belligerently purposeful motor cruiser, ominously painted deep grey and with a bow wave cascading over its gunwales swept around the headland. Fascinated, Toni and Timothy watched its skilful reconnaissance of the wrecked fishing boat on the beach, the heavy rolls of water created by the emphatic turns and then the sudden impetuous descent upon themselves, which set their small craft heeling and bobbing like a toy ship in a mill race.

The motor cruiser drew alongside in a swirl of waves and foam as the engines reversed. Three men in dingy whites, their faces shaded under broad-brimmed straw hats, stared across at them with hard contemplative eyes; not that hostile looks worried Toni, but the two pistols and the tommy gun they held in their hands suggested imminent skulduggery, which was, to say the least of it, disconcerting.

Too shabbily dressed for coastguards, she surmised. By their dark complexions and dark eyes they could be of any race East of the Adriatic. As the boat drew nearer she saw they had nothing of the classical mould of countenance she had noted about the Greeks they had met in their meanderings

amongst the islands of the archipelago. If anything they looked Asiatic.

She began to experience that unholy tingle of anticipation she always felt when something wicked passed her way.

The man with the tommy gun called to them peremptorily, but she could make nothing of it. She shook her head to indicate non-comprehension. He tried again in some other language and again she had to shake her head. Something, however, about the tones in his voice made her shout back in Russian, "Are you Russians?"

The three exchanged quick glances and the holder of the tommy gun called back in the same language, "That's our affair. You will answer my questions. Where is the man who brought that boat into the bay?" and he pointed with the gun to the beach on which the wrecked fishing boat lay.

"There was no man on the boat when she sailed across the bay," Toni answered truthfully, deciding on the spur of the moment not to divulge the fact that the owner of the boat was, at that moment, probably paddling along the sea bed under their keels.

"We are coming aboard to search your boat."

"On whose authority?" she snapped angrily. "And for what reason?"

The man grinned sardonically and patted the tommy gun. "This is my authority," he said.

"Can't argue with that," whispered Timothy, who had grasped the gist of the conversation, having a smattering of Russian.

"They are after the man who dived off the fishing boat," murmured Toni, "but they obviously don't intend him any good. I can't guess what it's all about, but my sympathies are with the diver. Keep quiet about him, Timothy. Just pretend you don't know what they are talking about."

"I'm with you, Toni! To put it mildly, I think they are villains."

"They certainly look it," Toni agreed.

The grey motor cruiser drew alongside and two of the men



leapt aboard close to where Toni was standing, defiantly determined not to move an inch though they almost fell on top of her. With brusque indifference they pushed past her and made for the cabin. Their search was soon over, but not a place that could conceal a man was overlooked. They even looked in the bilge and the bulkhead lockers.

"And now," said Toni when they came on deck again, "will you tell us by what right Russians are entitled to search a Greek boat in Greek waters?"

The man with the tommy gun looked at her steadily. "You are not Greek. I think you are American, though you speak Russian well."

"And so?"

"And so the man who was sailing the boat we were seeking to apprehend is an American criminal."

"Are you Greek coastguards?" she asked sarcastically.

He prodded her gently in the shoulder with the barrel of his gun. "You will not be impudent," he said quietly. "And you

will remain in the bay until we have solved the mystery of this vanishing American. As you can see he would not be able to scale the cliffs from the beach on which he has wrecked his boat. He must be amongst the rocks and as he is no doubt armed, I think he would have the advantage of us if we tried to go after him. I also think he is waiting for nightfall to come aboard your boat. Perhaps he had a rendezvous with you here."

"We had not intended to leave before morning," said Toni angrily, "but we shall leave at first light, without this American you talk about and about whom we know nothing at all!"

"We shall see," said the other imperturbably.

He and his companions returned to their own vessel, which drew away to a distance of about thirty yards where they cast anchor and until nightfall the three men took turns at scanning the beach and the rugged cliffs above it through a pair of powerful binoculars. When night fell with the usual Mediterranean suddenness a long beam of light flashed from the motor cruiser to illuminate the little beach. Slowly it moved from rock to rock, sweeping steadily backwards and forwards from one end of the beach to the other.

"Well," commented Timothy after watching the beam for some time in silence, "that's love's labour lost if anything is! Their American has probably swum away along the coast by now and landed at some less difficult spot. Good luck to him! They obviously haven't thought of his escaping that way."

"Oh, the big toughie with the tommy gun gave it a thought all right. He gave our gear a speculative look, but discounted it for some reason."

"What do you think they were after him for?"

"I can't say, but though they look villains as you say, there's a sort of cool authority about them. They look to me very like tough naval officers. I don't think they are just hoodlums."

"But what does that mean?"

Before Toni could answer a faint, almost inaudible rippling of water at the starboard side caused her to grip Timothy's arm in warning. "Go on talking," she whispered and silently

stepped along the bulwarks towards the place from which the sound had come. In the stern Timothy was chattering away about the delights of loukoumades, the honey fritters he had rather gluttonised on when they had pulled in to Patmos.

Toni pressed herself against the cabin, kneeling on the deck planks so that her silhouette would not be seen above the low structure against the starlit sky. She concentrated her gaze on the dark line of the bulwarks faintly visible against the dull gleam of the sea's surface. When a blurred shape rose slowly and silently over the edge of blackness she leapt forward, lithe and swift as a cat on a bird and grasped a reaching arm in a paralysing judo grip.

"Before you come aboard, explanations please," she hissed.

"Ah God! Go easy, lady! I've a bullet in my shoulder," an agonised voice whispered. "Help me aboard and I'll explain, but first how near are the Ruskies?"

"Thirty yards."

"Too near, but I can't hold out any longer—oh cripes, this arm—"

The agony in his voice convinced her and she released her hold and transferred her grip to the air cylinders on his back. Hauling on these she dragged him over the gunwale onto the narrow deck between the cabin and the gunwale, where he lay in a sort of dying gladiator attitude, his breath hissing painfully through his clenched teeth as if he were suppressing with great effort more emphatic ejaculations of distress.

"Can you crawl into the cabin?" she whispered. "The corner of the cabin is hidden from the Russian boat."

"Holy smoke, no!" he gasped. "I've got to be ready to go overboard again if the Russians should decide to come aboard you."

"But your wound?"

"It can wait a little longer. You're English, aren't you?"

"Yes. My brother is watching the Russian boat. Nobody else."

"Good enough. I'll take a chance with you—I've not much choice. Hell! This damn' wound!" He was silent for a time

after this ejaculation and Toni could see in the faint light that he was pressing his head against the deck in pain.

"It's madness," she whispered. "You'll have to get that gear off your shoulders and let me do something about your wound."

"No for God's sake! It's like I said. They mustn't get me. Now listen. There are things I've got to do and I need your help." Then he seemed to be making up his mind about something. Eventually, he said, "Look baby, I'm sorry I've got you into this. If it hadn't been for the wound, I'd have made it round the coast. It was an emergency I'd anticipated, but hell, who could expect a lucky shot from a quarter of a mile?"

Again he was silent.

"You sound O.K." he said at last. "Your voice—you smell right too. Sort of fragrant—sunshine and honey—"

"I am O.K. Forget the sunshine and honey. Go ahead. Talk."

"Sure. First I've got to immobilize the Russian boat. Then I've got to salvage something I dropped onto the sea bed."

"Yes?" said Toni sceptically.

"Then you take me to Athens."

"Why?"

"For Crissake! The thing on the sea bed is vital to the West. I got it out of Russia. So they want it back. Simple as that."

"Not so simple!" said Toni. "You couldn't do it. You are in no condition to go overboard again."

"Gotterbe," he mumbled.

"No you haven't got to be," whispered Toni decisively. "Now it's my turn. Tell me what is on the sea bed and where?—no I think I know that. I saw you throw it overboard. I'll get it and I'll immobilize the motor cruiser. Quick tell me. You're going to lapse into unconsciousness any moment. You're exhausted."

"Wait till dawn," he murmured. "You'll see the thing. A Grecian urn—long, pointed—decorated with scenes of Perseus and Medusa—snakey hair—winged sandals—" He was rapidly becoming incoherent, but he fought against unconsciousness and made a final effort. "Must put them out of action or they'll

overtake—Hell—kid like you—man't job—give me time. I'll be O.K."

Suddenly his whole body seemed to deflate and he lay slack and silent on the deck. Toni bent over him and listened for a moment to his heavy breathing. Satisfied he was not putting on an act, she felt his shoulders gently with her fingers. The wound was there all right on his left shoulder, a sticky cavity in torn muscle. She felt the shoulder under his body and felt a similar though larger cavity. The bullet had gone clean through the shoulder probably damaging the bones in its progress. She knew she had no alternative but to get him out of his breathing apparatus and attend to the wound as best she could. If the Russians decided to board their boat again it would be just too bad, but it was a risk she had to take or possibly have a dying man on her hands.

Between them she and Timothy dragged the American into the cabin, a difficult and painstaking operation since the boat was in full view of the Russian motor cruiser. The slow turning of the boat in the eddies of the bay helped and using the concealment of the superstructure at appropriate times it was accomplished eventually.

They stripped the American of his diving gear and then they saw the extent of the wound. It was obvious he had lost a lot of blood and Toni marvelled that he had had the stamina to stay in the water the time he had. She painted the wound lavishly with iodine from their simple medical-chest and padded and bandaged the shoulder with all the bandages they had.

"He will need hospital treatment pretty soon," said Toni. "It's a horrible wound."

"Can we slip away?" asked Timothy.

"We couldn't, I'm afraid. They would hear us and give chase. They would soon overtake us. Later maybe."

"What do you mean?"

"Timothy—please don't be alarmed. I'm going to put the Russian boat out of commission so that they won't be able to follow us."

"Toni, they're armed. You could not possibly get on board their ship without being detected," said Timothy, aghast at the idea.

"Leave it to me. Now do just as I say. When I go overboard get the boat ready for a quick start. Have the axe handy so that you can hack through the anchor cable in one swipe. Be ready to start the engine and keep as low as you can in case they start shooting."

"Toni—" he began in protest.

"Timothy, don't argue. There's no other way. The Russians believe we are hand in glove with the American and if they find him here they will see confirmation of their belief. And then what, Timothy?"

"They would kill us?"

"Perhaps. They have already tried to kill the American. So we have to make the first move."

"Toni—" began Timothy hesitantly. "What about my having a go at it? Tell me what you plan. I am pretty good under water, you know."

"Why bless you, Timothy!" said Toni, touched by his offer. "Of course you are good, but not as good as your little sister, you will admit!"

"How could I be, Toni?" he conceded, gratified that she had not stated the truth—that his infirmity completely mitigated against such a strenuous, hazardous venture as she proposed.

"Well?" she asked quizzically.

"Well, after all you are only a girl and—well—"

"Of course," said Toni meekly, "but I assure you it will be quite easy for me and not very dangerous."

"If you say so, Toni. All right I'll do as you say. Please take care, Toni—I couldn't bear—" He left the rest unsaid and Toni could see he was worried and far from convinced of anything except his own ineptitude.

"And watch the American. He might lapse into delirium. He was beginning to look a little feverish. Keep him quiet—"

"How?"

"Gag him—gently though."

What did it amount to? Danger and excitement and something rather dubious perhaps accomplished. She didn't know what the urn contained. Raw opium perhaps from some field in Turkey, worth maybe £200, but processed and refined in Italy to make pure heroin, which would eventually find its way to the U.S.A. where it would be sold for £100,000 or more? Well, she could scotch that, once she had her hands on the urn and discovered its contents. Then again, the American could be a U.S. agent, who had stolen something out of the U.S.S.R.—something vital to Western security, as he had maintained. She would know that too once she had the urn.

So either way it did amount to something that could greatly affect the welfare of some section of mankind.

She decided to immobilize the motor cruiser before dawn, anticipating that the Russians would not move before daylight. That was a risk she had to take so in preparation for her plan she rummaged in the fo'castle amongst the odds and ends of stores the little boat carried for emergencies at sea. Having found what she needed she donned her diving gear, and whilst Timothy kept watch on the Russian boat for any sign of an observer, casual or intentional, she slipped overboard with her bundle of amateur saboteur's accessories.

She swam deep down in the bay though the distance to the motor cruiser was a mere thirty or forty yards for the night was clear and bright with stars and a pale golden aura of moonlight hung over the headland from the low slung moon, giving the sea a soft phosphorescence.

She came up under the motor cruiser's keel and paddled her way to the stern where her groping fingers quickly discovered the screw. Then very slowly and methodically she twisted the end of a stout length of wire around the vanes. Twenty feet below her the other end hung in the water securely attached to a big toughened steel spanner of the type used on heavy marine nuts and bolts.

She then sank to the sea bed and returned to her own boat as unobtrusively as she had set out. Timothy helped her aboard

with a fervently whispered, "Thank God, Toni. I've been half crazy with anxiety. One of the Russians has been staring across at us for the last half-hour. Twice they have shone the light on us."

"We should try to sleep for an hour or two, Timothy," said Toni as she slipped out of her diving gear in the darkness of the cabin.

"How can you think of sleep?" Timothy protested.

"Oh easily, Timothy dear. I'm tired and there's nothing more we can do until dawn. We should waken at the first sign of activity on board the Russian boat. They will probably take watches on the searchlight and they will not worry about us. They would hear our engine if we tried to get away and they could overtake us in minutes."

As the rising sun began to brighten the southern horizon with a gentle opalescence, which turned the sea into a pale mirror of tarnished silver, Toni again put on her diving gear and slithering over the bulwarks behind the cabin, quietly and without a splash lowered herself into the sea.

The American was still in a deep exhausted sleep and was unaware of what was going on around him. Timothy was awake, though he had managed to sleep, and watched her from his bunk with apprehension and wonderment. Here was a Toni he had never seen before—a resourceful devil-may-care creature, a compound of steel and ice. He knew she had to do what she was doing for some essential reason of her own. He knew his safety was foremost in her mind, but he sensed an uncontrollable joy in her as if every moment of this dangerous adventure were something precious to savour.

She swam towards the headland, skimming over dark rocks and darker pits in the sea bed, which only the faintest gleam from the lightening sky touched, gliding through miniature forests of gently undulating sea plants, seeing the dusky greenness slowly turning to blue green and heliotrope. Shoals of fish swam close to investigate and then swerved violently away from her, flashing dull silver on the turn. A foraging octopus, sidling ominously along a patch of sand, turned into a cloud of sepia and vanished like a sea ghost.

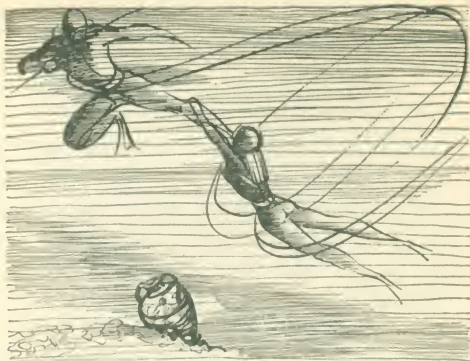
She broke the surface near the headland for a brief reconnaissance, then sank again to begin her search amongst the tumbled rocks and gulleys close to the crumbling cliffs. It was not going to be an easy search in the half-light under the sea, now changing from blues to olive greens and ochreous yellow, but again, increasing light above the sea's surface would mean awakening and activity aboard the Russian motor cruiser.

There was a disconcerting warmth in the light—a presage of the rising sun—when at last she saw the urn.

It was resting on a patch of sand on its side and clearly she could see the white cameo scene of Perseus and Medusa cut in the black glass. She remembered the Portland Vase in the British Museum and recognised a similarity except that this particular urn was pointed at the base. It could be valuable. Maybe it was the vase and nothing more that both the American and the Russians were so savagely seeking to possess. The Portland Vase was fabulously valuable—so might this be, and therefore somewhere along the line was larceny on a grand scale, like stealing the Crown Jewels.

Whilst these thoughts were running through her head she was swimming towards the Grecian urn across the sandy patch of sea bed and it was at that moment that a sudden premonition of danger assailed her—or perhaps subconsciously her mind had registered a faint shadow across the sand or a slight disturbance on the water above her, but her reaction was sure and immediate. With a swift eel-like swirl of limbs and body she shot sideways towards the rocks encircling the sand patch and briefly glimpsed a passing shape and a glint of steel.

But she was going to run from nothing and nobody and lithe as a dolphin or a porpoise she dived and turned and gripped a pair of legs flailing madly to make a rapid turn. There could only be menace in this unexpected encounter on the sea bed and so her instinct was to do the utmost violence in self-preservation, but she hesitated to go to the extreme and plunge her knife, now in her hand, into the naked back so readily at her mercy. The other realized his terrible predicament and struck wildly backwards with his knife, but Toni had anticipated



such a move and she slid away from the knife arm, and with one dextrous slash of her own knife cut clean through her opponent's air pipe from the cylinder to the mask.

Amid a swirl of bubbles from the severed pipe the other struggled away to the surface as Toni seized the urn from the sea bed and set off rapidly for the motor boat. It was all over in seconds, but to Toni it had seemed unreal and all in slow motion like a crazy dream without sound, with muted light and sluggish movement.

All now depended on her attacker's ability to convey a warning to the Russian motor cruiser when he reached the surface, but the chances were he would be pretty helpless for a time whilst he recovered from the half-drowning he must have had when the water flood his mask.

When she surfaced at the motor boat the American was there to help her aboard and as he did so the engine started, filling the bay with the sound of its detonations and sending two men on the motor cruiser running and shouting about the deck.

Toni saw Timothy at the wheel crouching low to gain the protection of the low cabin. From the motor cruiser came the sudden deep throbbing of its powerful engine and intermingled with the heavy pulsations was a staccato crackle as one of the crew opened fire with the tommy gun. Splinters flew from the side of the cabin, and the engine of the Russian boat whined as its revolutions mounted up to full speed.

Toni, half over the gunwale and trailing her legs in the wash of the boat's violent swirling, listened in agony as the note rose to a crescendo. Had her improvised immobilization failed? She pictured the wire coiling upwards from the sea bed, the big spanner rushing towards the screw. Surely, surely the wire alone would have slowed or stopped the engine by now? The spanner had merely been an embellishment, an extra guarantee of success—

When she had come to the doleful conclusion that the whole thing had come adrift, the deep efficient rumble turned to a discordant snarling and suddenly there was a shrillness of tearing metal. The motor cruiser was losing way! Thank God!

Shots threshed the water behind the boat into greater turbulence, but the distance was increasing and only a lucky burst from such a short range weapon as a tommy gun could do damage now.

Looking back Toni could see the bobbing head of the Russian diver half-way across the bay and his compatriots staring over the stern of the motor cruiser.

The American, exhausted after his efforts to help Toni aboard, was half lying, half sitting against the bulwarks, watching her strip off her diving gear.

"You're some girl!" he grinned. "In more ways than one!" he amended.

"Thank you!" said Toni dryly. "How do you feel?"

"Well, let's put it this way. I'm damned sure now, I couldn't have pulled that little thing off the bed of the ocean," he said indicating with a nod, the Grecian urn. "And may I ask what you did to the Ruskies' boat?"

"I snarled up the screw with some old wire—There was a spanner at the end of the wire."

"Whadya know!" said the American admiringly. "What's your name. It's something I'd like to cherish."

"Toni Blake. My brother is called Timothy."

"Hi Tim!" called the American weakly. "Pleased to know you."

Timothy acknowledged the greeting with a cheerful grin.

"I'm Bob Howard, U.S. Naval Intelligence, but don't broadcast it, please. You are entitled to know, I guess."

"You had better take it easy," Toni warned him. "We'll get you to the nearest island. There's sure to be a doctor or a hospital."

"Not on your life, lady! Athens if you please and the American Embassy."

"If you insist," said Toni. "Now, that rather lovely Grecian vase. Would you care to explain?"

"Sure! I bought it from a peasant up beyond Xanthe. He said it was genuine since he'd dug it up himself. I was posing as a tourist and it seemed a good thing to be carrying plus a few other items—bits of pottery—well you know how tourists lumber up with junk. I poured melted beeswax into it and embedded a little capsule of film in it. And what's on the film, lady, is sort of confidential between me and the U.S. Naval Intelligence. Don't ask me how I got the film. That's a long story."

"The fishing boat you wrecked?"

"Picked up at Alexandroupolis. All laid on. The tourist became a fisherman, but the Russians had got onto me by then. They almost had me off Chios where they got in that lucky shot. The headland saved me, but I had to get off that boat quick and there was only one way. Well I guess you know the rest."

"I don't doubt your story," said Toni sweetly, "but just for the sake of good Anglo-American relations I am going to dig into your beeswax."

"Like hell you are, baby!" exclaimed the American jerking

upright, but the effort caused him a sudden wave of nausea and faintness and he dropped back with a groan.

"You see," said Toni. "There's little you can do about it, is there?"

"Oh damnation, you female James Bond!" he gasped. "What's on your mind?"

"Nothing. I just feel there should be nothing between us."

"For God's sake! The film is undeveloped."

"So I might expect. As they say in America—relax."

He protested weakly as she picked up the urn and jumped down into the cabin with it, but he made no effort to follow her. Ten minutes later she returned with a tiny metal capsule in her hand.

"It is film as you said," she said calmly. "I opened the tin in the fo'castle. It's dark in there, you know. I apologise."

He made a wry grimace up at her. "No need to, Miss Bond. I guess you had to. In fact I'd sorta been a bit disappointed if you hadn't. What was on your mind?"

"Crude opium or morphine perhaps. In these waters."

"Of course. Don't blame you. What now?"

"Medical attention for you. A hospital. Athens since you wish it. I'll deliver your roll of film to the American Embassy."

"Not to the British Embassy?" he asked satirically. "Couldn't blame you—Miss Bond."

"Blake, please, Mr Howard, and I would certainly tell you if I intended to take your precious film to my own embassy."

"Sorry—er—Toni. Keep the pot as a memento."

"It could be valuable—er Bob," laughed Toni.

"Yeah? I doubt it! That peasant up in the hills probably turns them out by the gross for tourist suckers."

"It's very lovely and looks old," said Toni dubiously.

"So what? Take it home for auntie if you don't want it. And how long do you figure it's going to take us to reach Athens, because any moment now I'm going to pass out on you again or a Russian sub is going to pop up under your bows?"

"Twelve hours with luck," laughed Toni.

"Hell's bells!" said the American weakly.

A HAIR OF THE DOG

CHARLES TRELAWNEY

Nigel needed expensive treatment just to keep alive.

NIGEL HAD always hated dogs. They stank. They snapped. Whenever he came close enough to them—which was rarely by choice—they sank their vicious yellowed teeth into him. And their hairs played hell with his asthma.

He hated them from childhood. Because of his illness, he was a nervous, withdrawn child, bent-shouldered and weak-eyed from living too much of his life through books. His parents lived in a semi-detached house in South London, and their next-door neighbours owned two dogs—a grouchy Alsatian and a long-haired mongrel that looked like some unnatural cross between a dachshund and a Persian cat. Between them, they made life hell for Nigel. The Alsatian bit him mercilessly. The long moulting hairs of the mongrel brought on asthmatic attacks that confined him to bed for weeks on end. He bore the scars for the rest of his life.

Nigel needed expensive treatment just to keep alive. Long holidays in the pure, stingingly cold air of the Swiss Alps. Treatment in specialist German clinics. A private tutor at home to save him from the rigours of school-life. Nigel's father was a clerk, far from wealthy, and the vital money came from his great aunt—Auntie Wyn.

Auntie Wyn lived in a Victorian house on the sea front at Worthing, as big as an hotel and twice as unfriendly. She was rich; just how rich, no one knew, but rumour stretched the fortune to seven figures.

Nigel hated his visits to Auntie Wyn's. The house was always cold and spooky. There were no books other than stodgy Victorian romances.

And there were dogs—packs and packs of them.

Auntie Wyn kept Pekinese. Long-haired, squash-nosed, fretful dogs with pedigrees longer than the M1. They were every-

where, and had nonsensical names derived from Chinese dynasties. They waddled all over the valuable carpets, made messes in corners, and snapped at visitors' ankles from the cover of cavernous side-boards.

Auntie Wyn insisted that Nigel's family visit her four times a year. Her money was too important for them to run the risk of offending her. The visits always precipitated violent attacks of asthma for poor Nigel. He grew to dread them.

When Nigel was eighteen, it was Auntie Wyn who decided what his career was to be. Her great-nephew would become a veterinary surgeon. She would pay for the course, buy him a practice, buy his parents a new car. It was pressure that couldn't be resisted.

Nigel went to veterinary college.

On graduating, his first patient, a dog with hardpad, bit his hand and gave him asthma. After a month, he sold his share in the practice and moved to the country.

Things looked up. His practice was mainly with farm animals, and he soon got an assistant to deal with the occasional sheep-dog or canine pet. His business prospered. And the country air was kind to his asthma.

His parents died, but Auntie Wyn didn't. She lived on, with her pekes, in the big house in Worthing, and Nigel had to visit her, as his parents had done, four times a year. Each visit brought on his asthma.

He grew to hate Auntie Wyn, hate the visits to Worthing, hate the calendar that told him when the visits were due.

Yet he couldn't offend his great aunt. He knew all too well how ill he really was, how important it was for his health to leave England's smoggy climes for a chalet in the Alps. And he couldn't wait until his practice brought him the money to retire.

Gradually he began to realise that he couldn't wait until his great aunt died either. She was as strong as the donkeys that plodded up and down the pebbly beach outside her home.

It took him three months to work out the plan, and another six to gain regular unsuspected access to the National

Veterinary Quarantine Research Laboratory.

On his next visit to Worthing, he took his vet's bag.

Auntie Wyn died in agonised convulsions. Nigel didn't feel the slightest twinge of guilt. It paid her back for some of the torment he'd suffered in her house and through the asthma attacks that followed his visits there.

The death caused a stir. No one expected an elderly lady in West Sussex to die of hydrophobia. What was even stranger was that only one of her pekes—her favourite, Ming-Hi—had contracted the disease. A simple test cleared the remaining valuable dogs.

Nigel attended the reading of the will in black tie and arm-band. He was the only relative present—the only one living. The small courtesy bequests were read out first: 250 guineas to her trusty gardener; 500 to her faithful housekeeper, and a similar sum to the Parish Church Steeple Fund. And the remainder—£879,754 15s 7d—to her only surviving relative, her great nephew Nigel.

Nigel wheezed. The morose solicitor glanced up from the document on his desk and frowned, then continued to read.

There was a codicil—a condition to fulfill.

Nigel's wheezing grew worse. The solicitor had to wait before reading on.

It seemed Auntie Wyn had, in her later life, grown concerned about her great nephew's dislike of dogs. They were noble, intelligent, companionable creatures. She was sure he would find them so if he came into closer contact with them.

Nigel died within a year of his benefactress, and was buried alongside her in a Worthing cemetery. It was the asthma that had killed him, the constant attacks brought on by living in a large, cold house with nineteen long-haired Pekinese. He was only fulfilling the condition of the will—to look after Auntie Wyn's Pekinese while they lived, as his training so fitted him to. But with his illness and allergy, he hadn't stood a chance.

Dying without heirs, Auntie Wyn's fortune passed on to her favourite charity.

Battersea Dogs' Home.

DEATH HOUSE

Deep in the depths of Dartmoor;
'Twas far from the beaten track,
I stopped one day whilst on my way
At a tumbledown old shack.
There was lichen on the door-stoop,
There were toad-stools 'round the well;
The windows dark were bleak and stark
And a notice read, "Must Sell".

I parked the car in a meadow
And struggled through the brush.
On a log I sat and marvelled at
The awful, utter hush!
Not a sound reached me from the garden,
Not a tweet nor a squeak was heard;
Nor the sight of a snail on the border-rail,
Nor the glimpse of a bee or a bird.

As I sat with my back to the sunshine,
And I pondered on this place,
A clammy draught with a sudden waft
Caressed my shadowed face.
Then the sweat sprang out on my body,
And I felt the clutch of fear
Around my heart, as I gave a start,
Convinced that death was near!



A myst'ry to me is a challenge,
And despite my shaken nerve,
I walked toward that house of board
On a path with ne'er a swerve.
As I passed within the doorway,
I barely quelled a shout;
And I caught my breath, for the smell of death
Pervaded all about.

With my eyes on the door before me
And the hair on my neck bristling cold,
In my sight I saw passing through the door,
A body, crumbling . . . old!
I averted my gaze in horror
From that dreadful, putrid form;
And I dashed outside to the meadows wide;
To the sun's rays, bright and warm.

Whenever I go to Dartmoor,
And I see a house with a sign
Which reads, "Must Sell", then I drive like Hell,
And I make those top gears whine!
For the sight of that sickly body
Is so vivid in my mind,
That the Devil himself, on the night of the twelfth
Wouldn't make me look behind.

HERBERT J. MATTHEWS

1970

SNOW IS NOT FOR SNUFFING

JOHN TAVERNER

Illustrated by Vera Jarman

*"Stiffs depress me late at night . . . puts me off my
breakfast," said Miller*

BIG BEN was tolling the hour as the Police launch chugged slowly upstream through the enveloping yellow fog, but the famous clock's majestic boom was strangely muted by distance and this amorphous phenomenon of nature.

"Three o'clock in the morning! We've had it," said Detective Superintendent Logan of the Yard, and yawned hugely. "They've given us the slip again—thanks to this stinking fog!"

"You could hide the Q2 in this stuff," agreed Inspector Dusty Miller.

For some weeks Police and Customs had been co-operating in a hunt for a well-organised gang of dope smugglers. Tonight, acting on a tip-off from a reliable informer, they had joined forces in an attempt to trap one of the gang's landing-craft. Two Police and two Customs launches were involved, and Logan was in charge of the operation.

Logan shivered. "This fog is beginning to creep into my old bones, Dusty. . ."

Miller produced a leather-bound flask with alacrity. "Have a snifter of this, sir. I rather thought it was going to turn chilly."

"Drinking on duty? What's come over you?" said Logan ferociously, but grabbed the flask.

The mouthful of neat brandy exploded pleasantly in his

stomach, and he was considering calling off the operation when the constable in charge of the radio called to him.

"Our chaps in the other launch have just hauled a dead girl out of the water, sir," sang out the constable. "Any instructions?"

"Let's take a look at her before we wrap up for the night," said Logan sourly.

"Stiffs depress me late at night . . . put me off my breakfast," said Miller.

They groped their way through the fog to the other launch, and then Logan and Miller jumped over the intervening gap to be seized by Sergeant Wright, a huge man with an effervescent sense of humour. "I wouldn't recommend a dip at this time of night, sir . . ."

"Any gen on the girl?" said Logan.

"She's aged about eighteen or nineteen, sir. There's a leather handbag still attached to her wrist by an anti-snatch strap," said the Sergeant. "Letters in the handbag are addressed to Sally Andrews of 33 Merrydew Road, Islington . . . And it appears she worked for Millwards Engineering Company in Offerdyke Creek . . . She's down below, sir . . ."

The girl's thin body lay inert on the bunk. She had the face of a lovely child framed by ash-blond hair now lank after immersion in the cold polluted waters of the Thames, and her cornflower-blue eyes were fixed and glazed. Her slender hands lay on her bosom as though in pathetic supplication. She was wearing a sleeveless blue frock, now stained and torn.

"The kid's damned thin . . . almost emaciated," observed Miller.

Logan bent over the dead girl. Her arms were covered with tiny blue scars, some of them infected.

"Another hard-liner . . . Heroin for a bet," said Logan grimly. "And she's not much more than a child . . . What a bloody waste!"

"I'd like to get my hands on the bastard who started her off," breathed Miller. "Probably got her started on pot for kicks . . ."

"The man I'd like to get my hands on is Mister Alessad Papadool," said Logan broodingly. "He's responsible for eight per cent of all drug-pushing in London . . . But so far I haven't been able to pin anything on him—not even a traffic offence . . ."

Then Logan examined the dead girl's slender hands. Her left thumb-nail was torn, and a strand of red thread dangled from the nail of her right index finger. Logan removed the thread with tweezers, and put it into a plastic envelope. "Let's go," he said straightening up. "My bed is calling . . ."

As the launch was moving slowly down the river, Logan said: "Ask the Pathologist who carries out the post mortem to make a detailed analysis of the water he finds in her stomach and lungs, Miller . . ."

"Why?" said Miller sleepily. "Surely all Thames water is the same filthy mixture?"

"The Commission for the Prevention of Pollution to Britain's rivers would explode if they'd heard that observation!" growled Logan.

The manager of Millwards Engineering Company was a lean man in his mid-fifties with unblinking brown eyes and craggy features. His hard expression softened when Logan explained the reasons behind his visit.

"A lovely young kid—and a good worker," said the manager. "She left the firm—let's see—about three months ago . . . I don't know why, although my secretary did tell me there was a rumour she was going off the rails . . . You'd better have a word with Peggy Shanklin . . . She used to be a good friend of Sally's. . . ."

Peggy Shanklin was a young pretty brunette with intelligent grey eyes. The colour drained out of her cheeks when Logan gently broke the news of her friend's death.

"Oh no!" she gasped. "You say drowned? But how? Sally was scared stiff of water . . . wouldn't even travel on a ferry-boat . . . She's been that way ever since she was a child . . ."

"Did you know she was addicted to drugs, Miss Shanklin?"

Her eyes widened. "Impossible!" and then the expression in her intelligent grey eyes altered. "Although that could explain . . ." her voice trailed away.

"Explain what, Miss Shanklin?"

She said reluctantly: "I knew Sally so well, Superintendent. We grew up together . . . We were very close—until she met up with Nigel Fene . . . that was about eight months ago . . . Then she started to alter . . ."

"Go on, please," coaxed Logan.

She sorted her thoughts, and then said: "Fene's very good looking—if you like the swarthy type . . . He has a swish red Alfa Romeo sports car. The combination of the two was too much for Sally. She went for him in a big way . . . He used to keep her out until all hours, and she used to spend a lot of her time with him at a crummy joint called the Crowing Cock on the River . . . She was always telling me about it, so I got my boy-friend to take me there one night . . ."

"What happened?"

"It was one of those mode places . . . you know, psychedelic decor, way-out music from guitars and such . . . The place was full of young people, and you could smell pot everywhere . . . Anyway, I tried to persuade Sally to come away with us . . ."

"Did she?"

She shook her head. "Sally wasn't tight, but her eyes were sort of strange and shiny . . ."

"What did she say?" said Logan.

"She didn't just refuse, she created a dreadful scene," she said. "Then Fene stepped in and told us to get out . . . He said the Crowing Cock wasn't for squares . . ."

"Did you speak to her again?"

"Several times," she said ruefully. "But it was no good . . . Strange, she'd shake and tremble, and cry her eyes out. But just as I thought I was getting somewhere with her, she'd disappear into the toilet . . . She'd come back quite a different person . . . All calm but with that shiny look in her eyes . . ."

The Secretary of the Commission For The Prevention Of

Pollution was a plump little man with merry blue eyes and a brisk manner.

"How extensive are your tests on the Thames, Mister Appleby?" said Logan, and lit up his pipe.

"We test and analyse the River and its tributaries every two hundred yards. Why, Superintendent?"

Logan handed him the Pathologist's report on Sally Andres. "Please read the section dealing with his analysis of the water found in the deceased's organs. . . . I'm hoping you can relate the soil trace elements with one particular stretch of the River . . ."

Half an hour later, Appleby placed his forefinger on a huge plan pinned to the wall. "This small area," he said. "It was fairly easy to identify because this is the only section where the silicas reach into the River."

Logan grunted with satisfaction. The Crowing Cock stood on the banks of this section.

Logan went into his office at the Yard, and Dusty Miller looked up at him expectantly. Logan gave him the details of his visit to Appleby, and finished up by saying: "Who are we going to put on to the Crowing Cock?"

"How about me?"

"Don't be wet!" growled Logan. "We've got 'copper' written all over us. I want a lad who can pass himself off as a hippy . . . I've a strong hunch we've got a lead to Papadool and I don't want to scare 'em . . ."

Miller snapped his fingers. "I know just the man for this job. Sergeant Rivers of the Narcotics Squad."

Logan nodded. "See if he's available. I've only met him briefly."

Ten minutes later, Sergeant John Rivers came into the room. He was tall and sinewy without an ounce of superfluous flesh, and he was wearing dirty gym shoes, a pair of baggy red corduroy trousers, and a stained anorak with a piece of tatty fur sewn to its collar. He had long fair hair, sleepy blue eyes, and his cheeks were covered in a two-day stubble.

"You sent for me, sir?" said John Rivers, and Logan caught a whiff of stale beer.

Logan looked him up and down, and grinned. "You deserve to be arrested on sight, Sergeant!"

"The uniformed boys have hauled me in on two occasions, sir," said John Rivers with an amiable smile. "What's the job?"

Then Logan gave him his instructions.

It was dark when Rivers parked the Q car outside the Crowing Cock, but he spotted the Alfa Romeo immediately; its red immaculately kept coachwork gleaming sleekly under the light of the single bulb illuminating the parking area. Rivers ambled across to the expensive car. He glanced around him. There was no one in sight, so he swiftly placed a small electronic gadget behind its chrome rear bumper; its built-in magnet holding it firmly into position. Then Rivers put on a pair of large sun-glasses; glasses into which had been fitted a minute microphone capable of picking up whispered conversations a hundred feet away from the wearer.

The big softly-lit room was full of young people sitting at tables who were arguing and talking loudly to make themselves heard above the brazen din emanating from the juke-box. Most of them were wearing off-beat, raffish clothes proclaiming affinity with Carnaby Street, and Rivers melded easily into their company. The walls, ceiling and long bar had been painted in what the hippies described as 'psychadelic decor', and this combined with the soft lights conspired to give a swimming effect to the whole place.

The only person at the long bar was a spotty-faced youth with long hair who was staring gloomily into his glass of beer. Rivers went over to stand beside him, and a hard-faced barman put down his newspaper to stare at him questioningly.

"A large gin and water, please," said Rivers.

The barman brought his drink, and Rivers paid for it with trembling hands. Then he picked up the glass and it clinked against his teeth as he swallowed half of the contents in one gulp; a fact that the barman did not miss before he went back to his newspaper.

Rivers turned to the youth, and said casually: "Sally Andrews been in tonight?"

The youth turned opaque, muddy eyes on Rivers. "Sally Andrews? Haven't seen her since she had an up-and-downer with her boyfriend Fene the other night. I—"

The barman came over and thrust his craggy chin at the spotty-faced youth. "We don't want to make no trouble by talking out of turn, do we, Percy?" he grated, and Percy flinched.

"No harm intended, mate," said Rivers placatingly to the barman. "I knew the bird when she was working for Millwards. So what's wrong with asking after her?"

The barman stared at Rivers with suspicious eyes. "You asked if she'd been in tonight . . . I don't remember you being in here before, and I've a bloody good memory for faces."

"That's right. This is my first visit. A friend told me about this place," said Rivers.

The barman gazed at Rivers' hands that were trembling, and then at the twitch at the corner of Rivers' mouth. The barman grinned wolfishly.

"Could you manage a fix?" said Rivers in low, pleading tones.

The barman looked about him, and then turned to Percy. "Beat it, Percy."

When the youth had retreated, the barman said to Rivers: "Identify yourself."

Rivers pulled back the left sleeve of his anorak to reveal a forearm pocked with tiny blue scars. "Okay," said the barman. "But don't ever ask again like that at the bar. Next time ask for a whisky and lime with bitters. Then meet me in the Gents and I slip you a fix. Five quid a time . . ."

"Thanks. I'll know better next time," said Rivers.

The barman nodded and went off down the passage, and returned shortly afterwards to place a gnarled palm on the counter. "A fiver, and take it quickly . . . And remember the drill next time . . ."

Rivers placed a five pound note on the counter, and picked



up the twist of paper when the barman lifted his hand. Then he went out quickly to the lavatory. He stayed in the lavatory for ten minutes before returning to the bar.

He was on his second gin when a tall, darkly-handsome man strode in and went over to the far end of the bar. He was sleekly-dressed, and Rivers thought Peggy Shanklin's description of Nigel Fene fitted him like a glove—but she hadn't mentioned Fene's hotly-glowing eyes that had a hypnotic quality. The barman served Fene with a whisky and soda.

"I'm off on the rounds, Foxy," the tiny microphone relayed Fene's whisper to Rivers. "The Big Man's attending Thursday's sort out, so see these kids don't get in his hair. The meeting's at nine . . ."

"They'll behave themselves," muttered Foxy, and watched Fene toss down his whisky and stride off.

Rivers finished his drink in a leisurely manner, and then ambled out to his car. The Alfa Romeo had gone. Rivers

climbed into the Q car, and unzipped the canvas of the miniature radar set half-concealed under the dashboard. He turned a switch and the glass screen, graduated in concentric circles, suffused with blue light. A white dot blinked and moved on the screen. The 'homing' instrument concealed under the bumper of the Alfa Romeo was giving out an electric impulse that enabled Rivers to follow the car wherever it travelled.

It turned out to be a long and tiring night for Rivers. Between ten o'clock and three in the morning Fene visited eighteen clubs, bars and casinos, ranging in type from sleazy haunts in Soho and Pimlico to smart expensive night-clubs in the West End. All these nocturnal establishments had one factor in common: some eighty per cent of their customers were not older than twenty-five.

Dawn was fracturing the dark bowl of night when Rivers returned to his Section House. He removed the portable radar set, and took it up to his sparsely-furnished bedroom. He switched it on, and set an oddly-shaped alarm clock in front of it. If the blinking dot, now stationary, moved, its movement would activate the clock's photo-electric cell, and the alarm bell would ring.

Next morning Rivers went down to breakfast in the Canteen. He set up the radar set on his table and got stuck into a large steak, chips and tomatoes. He was just finishing his second cup of coffee when the blinking dot on the screen started to move.

Rivers peered around the corner into one of the quieter streets in a select area of London's suburbs. The Alfa Romeo was parked behind a green van which bore the words: Supreme Tyre Services Limited. Fene was talking to two men dressed in long white dust-coats. Then the two men got into the van, and drove up the street and drew in behind a big car with a GB plate on the back. Rivers identified the big car as a Daimler. The men climbed out and went into the front garden of the house immediately opposite the Daimler.

Shortly afterwards, the two men returned with an elderly man who from his manner appeared to be the owner of the

Daimler. The two men in white dust-coats swiftly scrutinised each tyre in turn, while the elderly man opened the boot of the car. Then the two men removed the spare wheel carefully, and then one of them went to the back of the van and returned with a complete wheel which he placed in the boot of the Daimler. The men picked up the spare wheel of the Daimler, saluted the elderly man, put the wheel in the van, and drove off.

Rivers waited until the Alfa Romeo and the van were out of sight, and then drove up and had ten minutes conversation with the owner of the Daimler.

Logan and Miller were studying photostat copies of a blood-stained axe found at the site of a murder case when John Rivers knocked on the open door before entering the office.

"You look as if you've been on the razzle all night, Sergeant," said Logan. "Take a pew . . ."

"It's been a long night, sir, but no razzle-dazzle involved," said Rivers, and slumped his long length into a chair.

"Any leads?" said Miller.

"Quite a few and I've a few ideas of my own," said Rivers, and proceeded to make his report.

Rivers finished up by saying: "I've checked with Records, and sixty per cent of the clubs, bars etcetera belong to Papadool and the remainder belong to known associates of his. Supreme Tyre Services Limited is owned solely by Papadool."

Logan frowned thoughtfully. "So that's how it's done," he said slowly. "A real brand new gimmick. This Tyre outfit advertise a cheap service by offering a Trouble-free tyre Service while on holiday on the Continent. I've seen their adverts in the papers and on telly . . . Their agents on the Continent have a list of the subscribers, pick on one car, deliberately puncture the tyre, and then replace the inner-tube with one that contains drugs . . . Then the Continental agents wire the number of the car carrying the drugs to their London office. . . . Then the London office sends around the van to exchange the spare wheel with one of the same make . . . Probably the wall of the spare has damaged badly when punctured . . . Quite ingenious!"

"But all this is pure assumption," protested Miller. "You don't *know* there are drugs in the inner tubes. You—"

Logan scowled at him. "Then why didn't the van go to their London Depot? Why was the van escorted by Fene straight to the Crowing Cock? There can be only one answer to that—they do not want Supreme Tyre Services Limited involved in the distribution of drugs. They're the front for collection—but the Crowing Cock must be the distribution centre. Then Fene attends to the sub-distribution to the bars and clubs..."

"What are we going to do about the meeting at the Crowing Cock on Thursday night, sir?" said Rivers.

Logan stared at the large photograph of Papadool on his desk. Papadool was fat and bald, and his piggy eyes were almost concealed under the pouches. The mean wet mouth smiled tightly above his stubbled jowls.

"This is the basket I want more badly than any other criminal I've ever chased," said Logan, tapping the photograph with his finger. "You're going to bat on a sticky wicket, Rivers, but if you pull it off properly I'm going to put in a recommendation for your promotion to Inspector..."

"Thank you, sir," said Rivers, and then Logan told them what he wanted done...

Late that afternoon John Rivers travelled up the Thames in a cabin-cruiser that had been hired by the Yard. One of the River Policemen, wearing civilian clothes, skippered the boat, and Rivers lay comfortably on a bunk in the cabin.

The engine's beat slowed to idling, and the River Policeman called out: "We're approaching the place now."

Rivers picked up the big Zeiss field glasses and studied the layout of the Crowing Cock through the powerful lenses. The rear of the Crowing Cock was separated from the Thames by eighty feet of ill-kept garden, and from the garden's edge protruded a wooden jetty. The timbers of the jetty appeared to be comparatively new.

Rivers examined the main building carefully. It was single-storied, but the sloping terrain was such that the rear end was

supported by buttresses, and these had been enclosed with brickwork to provide a sizeable basement. Let into the centre of the basement was a black-painted door which had a Yale lock and a large padlock.

As they were chugging down the Thames, Rivers said: "What kind of a night can we expect tomorrow?"

The River Policeman glanced at his Nautical Almanac. "There'll be a quarter moon," he said, and Rivers cursed aloud.

On Thursday night the moon was hiding behind a grey-tinged cumulus cloud as Rivers rowed away from the Police launch in a dinghy. The dinghy bumped gently against the wooden jetty, and Rivers tied the boat's mooring rope to it before leaping on to the stout planks.

Rivers, his face blacked and clad in black sweater and slacks, sped soundlessly towards the cellar door. He thrust a jemmy between the hasp of the lock and the timber and twisted. The screws came out of the timber with a faint screech. Tensely, he listened for a moment, then thrust a sheet of stiff celluloid between the Yale lock and the jamb, and pressed. The door opened soundlessly on well-oiled hinges, and Rivers prayed there was no burglar-alarm system within.

He played the beam of his torch around the room, which had a flight of wooden steps leading to the Crowing Cock above. He was in a neatly-kept store-room; racks of marine and motor spares; nuts and bolts and spanners of various types and sizes. He peered into each recess, and then he spotted the three car inner-tubes at the end of one of the racks. Each of the inner-tubes had been cut open around the outer circumference. He opened one of the inner-tubes and examined the interior.

He moistened a fingertip with saliva, placed it against the traces of white powder, and then gingerly tasted it. He gave a grunt of satisfaction.

A door leading out of the store was not locked, and he stepped into a comfortably-furnished sitting-room in the centre

of which was a large refectory table with eight chairs grouped around it. Rivers decided this was where the meeting would be held next Thursday night at nine p.m. and stuck the sharp prong of the microphone into the underside of the table.

The remainder of the accommodation beneath the Crowing Cock consisted of a bedroom with adjoining bathroom. He started on the bathroom. Within the lavatory cistern he found a packet wrapped in oilskin. The packet contained four or five pounds of heroin.

In the bedroom, he first examined the contents of the wardrobe. His eyes narrowed when he saw the red jacket on a hanger. He removed three threads from the jacket, and placed them in a plastic envelope. Then he turned his attention to the rest of the bedroom.

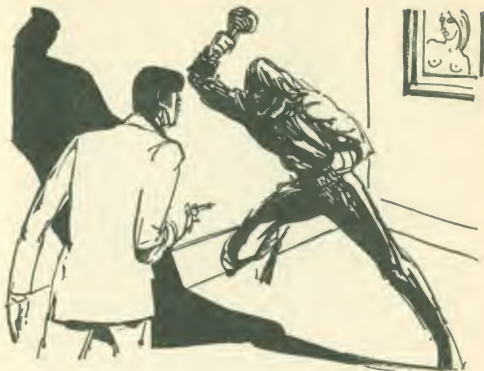
At the last moment he found a small brass wall-safe concealed behind a framed Picasso print which was hinged to the wall. He went back to the bedside table and pulled out the drawer. He grinned to himself, and picked up the bunch of keys. The basket had been careless over this.

The safe contained two dozen pornographic photographs, two leather-bound diaries, a thick wad of ten pound notes, two spools of tape-recording and a small ledger. Rivers hurriedly scanned the contents of one of the diaries that covered the last six months of the current year, and then he briefly examined the small ledger. Then he glanced at his watch. Five past eight, and time to clear out of here. He pocketed the diaries and ledger and closed the safe.

He had just screwed the padlock into position, and he was beginning to think of what it would be like to be called 'Inspector' now that his task had been successfully completed.

But his task had not been completed by any means.

Rivers heard a faint rustling behind him and spun around to find a black shadow menacing him. The "plop" of the silenced gun was accompanied by a searing sheet of agony in his left shoulder, and the force of the bullet spun him off balance to one side. The second shot went wide, and this galvanised Rivers into action. He leapt at his assailant and



smashed at his head with the heavy torch before seizing and twisting away the gun. Then Rivers dropped the gun as his opponent's hard fist crunched against his temple, and now Rivers was fighting for his life.

The fight was short and savage, and it was fought in silence. Rivers feinted with his left, and then kicked his opponent viciously in the groin. The man squealed in agony, and, as he doubled up, Rivers hit his neck with a superbly delivered karate chopping blow. The man collapsed.

Gasping, Rivers felt the warm blood coursing down his heaving chest from the wound in his shoulder. Then the horned moon peered over the edge of a dark cloud and bathed the face of his assailant. It was Nigel Fene. Rivers summoned his flagging strength, stuffed the silenced gun into his belt, and started to drag Fene's inert body to the dinghy. He dumped Fene unceremoniously into the dinghy, cast off, and rowed out to Logan's command launch.

Brawny hands hauled them aboard. Fene, still unconscious, twitched uncontrollably, and Rivers gasped out his report.

Rivers finished up by saying: "I think you'll find that the maroon threads you found on the girl will match the ones I removed from his jacket . . . But most incriminating of all are the diaries . . . The man's a crazy pervert! He's recorded all the horrible details of how and why he drowned the girl . . ."

"And the ledger?" prodded Logan.

"I'm not sure. There wasn't time to study it properly. But I think it's a record of the disposal of the drug system," said Rivers, and then he fainted.

He recovered consciousness to find Logan bending over him in the darkness. "Why the devil didn't you tell me you'd stopped one?" demanded Logan. "Fortunately it's only a flesh wound."

"I was going to tell you, sir," said Rivers weakly. "But then—"

"Take it easy, lad, you've done a pretty sound job," said Logan gently. "Now sit in on the kill from the stalls. We've just had word that Papadool has passed the five squad cars hidden at the turn-off. The squad cars are now taking up position to close the trap. Papadool's Rolls has just been parked outside the Crowing Cock, and he has gone into the place . . ."

Minutes later, a myriad sounds came from the amplifier that was linked to the microphone concealed beneath the refectory table within the basement of the Crowing Cock; a door opening, then footsteps growing louder; then a scraping of chairs being moved; a few coughs, and then silence.

Then a hard, grating voice said over the ether: "Good evening, gentlemen."

"Papadool!" breathed Logan, and switched on the tape-recorder.

"Evening, Big One," chorussed a number of voices.

"Be seated," ordered the Big One.

Silence for a moment, and then the Big One said: "Before the dope supplies are divided, I want to give you all a serious warning." his voice was charged with menace now. "That

clown Fene dumped his junkie girl-friend in the River a few night's ago. I've told you enough times never to get tied up personally with junkies. It can only lead to trouble. Fene disobeyed my orders, and knew I'd heard about it. That's why he's scarpered. You'll hear what happens to him when I catch up with him, and it'll be an example of what happens to those who step out of line. You hear me?"

"Yes, Big One!" they chorussed.

"You'll each be in the twenty-thousand a year bracket when we're really organised," went on the Big One. "But we can't take any risks—judges and juries don't take kindly to our profession. And that's all I have to say."

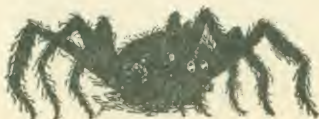
Logan pressed the button on his microphone.

"Logan calling squad cars A, B, C, D, and E," said Logan in a clear calm voice. "Close in on target now, and switch on all lights! Confirm, car A."

"Car A calling Superintendent Logan. Your orders confirmed."

The police launches moved forward in a line until their prows were nuzzling the banks of the river. Suddenly, the five searchlights on the launches blazed on and joined forces with the squad cars' headlights to illuminate the Crowing Cock's rambling building in a pitiless glare, and the uniformed policemen leapt ashore in blue waves to spring the trap.

Logan paused briefly to watch the changing patterns of light and shadows, and then leapt ashore clumsily and attempted to catch up with the much younger constables under him. He wondered if they served Draught Bass in the Crowing Cock . . .



MURDER FROM MEMORY

F. E. EVANS

Letcomb lifted his customer's chair further back . . .

THE PORTLY man with the florid complexion lowered himself into the chair. As he let his bulk drop the last few inches he gave an involuntary grunt. The barber watched him and thought how much he wanted to kill him.

Not murder him. That was different; something brutal, ugly. Just kill, because Robert Jonas would be better lying horizontally, six feet below the ground.

The barber took a clean white cloth, shook it open. The florid face of his customer looked at him from the mirror ahead, but the glance held no recognition. Robert Jonas didn't know this barber. The name Arthur Letcombe, even if he had noticed it over the shop front, would have meant nothing to him. His eyes, seen in the mirror, had an aggressive look. "Come on!" he grunted. "Get moving!"

Before the customer had come in Letcombe had had just one desire. To take the weight off his foot; to do something to ease it. Then someone had come in, to keep him standing on it. A customer out of his usual district, dropping in on the chance sight of the barber's pole outside the saloon. Robert Jonas.

Letcombe moved forward to take lather-soap and brush from the wash-basin. He limped slightly and his customer's eyes noticed it. "No wonder you're slow," he sneered. He raised his tone "What are you—a cripple?" He was obviously in a bad temper. The heat, perhaps; it was trying to people of normal build, people without over-florid complexions.

Letcombe began to lather. As his finger helped the brush he realised just how much Jonas had deteriorated physically. When he had met Sybil he had been big, but in a different way. Good figure of a man, people had said. Perhaps Sybil had thought that. And he'd always had a hearty, mock-genial way with him. Perhaps to Sybil he'd been a brother-figure, or a

father-figure; a self-confident, plenty-to-say, I know what's best, I'll run things, figure.

Psychologists knew about these things, Letcombe thought, using hot water and cloths. They might know why a girl like Sybil, quiet, an only child, remote somehow and not easily able to meet people half-way, had fallen for Jonas three years ago.

Letcombe moved to the wash-basin again, reached for a razor and as he stepped back to the chair a twinge in his foot caused him to limp again. His customer noticed it and let him see that he'd noticed. Just with a flicker of his small eyes.

Letcombe thought again of killing him. How desirable it was. But how impossible. Killing was murder to those in authority and they didn't like it. They hang people for it . . . or do they, now? Letcombe wasn't sure; the law had changed but they put people in prison for a very long time, just the same. He was thirty-two now; he'd be well over middle-age when he came out, because prison put age on to your years also. To lie in wait somewhere for Robert Jonas, to break into his house, to do anything else of a violent nature would only mean virtually giving his own life for Jonas's. And for Sybil's. That brought his thoughts full circle back to Sybil.

He felt the bristles of his customer's one-day growth still stiff and went back for lather, began to work it in again. Jonas grunted. He'd noticed the slight stiff pull of the bristles. "Get it off smooth," he said. "I don't want to go out with my face smarting, dam it."

The barber nodded. He didn't speak. His thoughts went on again. Whatever the reason why Sybil had married Jonas, he knew why Jonas had married her. For her money. Not a fortune, of course. Just a nice comfortable sum that her father, a widower, had left her. Enough to see her nicely placed in life; no frills, just a pleasant sufficiency with that bit of security for the years ahead that made all the difference to life. It had put Letcombe off a bit. He'd been uneasy about it, thought Sybil might think he was interested in her money. But he knew she wouldn't really. She wasn't that kind, which made it so easy for Robert Jonas.

No, the barber thought, finishing his lathering. She just didn't want him, Letcombe, in that way. She liked him, quite liked him. That was all. So she'd said "No," and then, gently "I'm sorry." And he had known that she meant both things.

That was why it would be only right if he could kill Robert Jonas. Because it would be just retribution. Justice. Simply an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. Not personal revenge for himself; malice because he'd been replaced by someone else. No, it wouldn't be for what had happened to him; it would be because of what had happened to Sybil.

His customer grunted again "Going to be all day?" he said. Letcombe put the lather-soap and brush away. He picked up a razor and began to strop it mechanically, thoughts far away.

He'd moved from Sybil's district. He lived too near; saw her, even by chance, too often and it was painful. But he'd kept asking about her, hearing what happened. Particularly as he knew of Jonas and heard that he was moving in. Pressing what was at first only an acquaintance, using that hearty, and at that time jovially, assertive personality, getting her to rely on him. Then he married her. And when he'd got her money and in the course of time spent it, he left her. Having, of course, given her what is known as a dog's life . . . except that people don't treat dogs that way nowadays.

Then one day Sybil Wheatley sat in her small, lonely bed-sitter and thought that there were just two things she wanted. One was a nice cup of tea and the other was a nice, long rest. So she put the kettle on, put plenty of tea into the pot and had a really nice cup from it. Then she lay on her bed, tilted half a bottle full of sleeping tablets into her hand, swallowed them all and had a nice, long rest. Forever.

Letcombe tilted his customer's chair further back. He drew the enveloping cloth closer and holding the folds of it tightly he also gripped the back of the chair. He stroked the razor lightly down Jonas's neck and leaning over whispered in his ear "D'you remember Sybil Wheatley?"

Jonas started slightly, looked up at him for a moment in a puzzled way, uneasy.

"I do," said Letcombe. "Never mind why. So I'm going to draw this razor an inch or so sideways. Across your main artery here. And kill you."

Robert Jonas gave a half-strangled gasp. He tried to lift himself in the chair but its angle, his bulk and Letcombe's hand, concealed but gripping the cloth, prevented him. He managed to say "You can't! You'd never get away with it!" The barber said quietly into his ear "I can you know. I limp—you sneered at it. An unexpected slip—and a weak foot will give way. Won't it? And an accident will happen. Too bad. Tragic, in fact, for you."

Jonas's eyes stared wildly at him. He made another great but abortive effort to force up his body and his already florid face became purple. Then suddenly he seemed to collapse like a pricked balloon. Letcombe walked to the telephone. Within minutes an ambulance arrived and then removed all that was left of Robert Jonas. Just his body, nothing more.

Letcombe went into an inner room. He sat down and took his aching foot in his hands. He removed his shoe. His fingers found the projecting point of the nail that had worked its way through the inside leather and had begun to jab painfully into his foot, soon after he'd put his usually comfortable working shoes on when he arrived that morning.

He picked up a pair of pliers. Holding them, he thought for a moment again of Robert Jonas. He'd only known a certain amount about him. That he had a mean, cruel nature underneath the hearty, jovial exterior. And one other thing. That he had a bad heart.

That fact had come back into his mind when he'd seen Jonas in the chair, while he had been lathering that florid face. A mental shock, a sudden violent physical strain, could be very bad for a man like that.

With the pliers Letcombe removed the offending nail. He put on the shoe and going back into the shop, prepared for the next customer. As he moved about easily he knew that he had cured the soreness in his foot. And that, at least to a certain extent, he had eased the pain in his heart.

SOMEONE WATCHING

BETTINE MANKTELOW

The latch on her door was being lifted, and she heard the soft click . . .

SHE AWOKE with a start. There was no sound in the attic room but her own heart beat pounding uncomfortably against her chest, so loud she felt sure anyone could hear it. She was wide awake at once, her eyes straining fearfully into the darkness around her large bed. She felt sure there was someone there. Someone watching.

There was no moon that night. Usually Celia hated the moonlight coursing down from the dormer window over her bed, playing on her face, casting shadows into the corners of the old room, but tonight she would have loved even a small glimmer of moonbeams to probe the darkness around her bed.

There could be no-one there, she told herself. Why should there be? And yet why had she woken in such fear? And why had she this uncanny feeling of someone watching?

She didn't call out, or draw attention to herself. If someone is there, she reasoned, I shall put him on his guard by calling out, better to lie here and pretend to be asleep, and perhaps he will go away.

But she could not bring herself to close her eyes. She had to look, to see, to make sure that there was in fact nobody there at all. She lay there for hours, and only when the birds were busy outside with their dawn chorus, and the first pale rays of the autumn sun were creeping over the window-sill, did she slip into an exhausted sleep.

When she awoke again it was past nine o'clock. She chided herself for oversleeping. There was no time for a bath. She washed and dressed hurriedly and applied her make up, noticing with some despair that the grey roots were already showing through the tint. There was so much to do running a country hotel, she hardly had time to have her hair set.

As she passed the dining room, she saw at a glance that the Misses Pemberley and the Colonel had already finished their breakfast. Thank heavens she could rely on her staff. Jim Beckett, the handy man and general factotum since her husband died, was clearing away the plates. He gave her a quick, warm smile as she passed by. Big, reliable Jim, what a comfort he was!

In the kitchen his wife, Millie, was halfway through the washing-up.

"What must you think of me?" Celia said, shame faced. "Sleeping so late, and leaving you all the work to do?"

"We can manage, Mrs Marchant," said the capable Millie, smiling. "You can't do everything."

"No!" Celia sighed. "It's not as if Peter were much help. No sign of my stepson, I suppose?"

"It's not 11 o'clock yet, Ma'am," Millie replied briefly.

Celia poured herself a cup of coffee and lit a cigarette. Oh, to relax! She hadn't been able to relax since Frank had died. It was such a responsibility running a business alone—or almost alone. The Becketts, they were a marvellous couple. They ought to have their own pub, it would suit them, but of course they lacked the capital. She was sure they would have left years ago if they had any money put by. Yet how would she manage without them? How rarely did one find staff that were reliable, hard-working and honest as well? If only Peter would shoulder some of the responsibility. She would have to speak to him about it, distasteful as it might be.

But it was gone 11 o'clock before Peter showed his face downstairs that day. Then yawning, and dishevelled, he took himself immediately to the lounge bar and poured out a large whisky, and with the glass in his hand, the morning paper spread out on his knee, huddled up on the window seat oblivious to all.

Celia found him there, and was immediately filled with disgust at his indolence. Everything had gone wrong that morning, as it always did if she overslept. She felt in the mood for a row.

The bar smelt slightly of stale beer and smoke, even though the windows were open. Apart from her own room this was Celia's favourite part of the house. She loved the low ceiling, and the heavy oak beams, the leaded light windows, and the wide stone fireplace. It was when she had seen this room she had fallen in love with the hotel and decided to accept the job that Frank Marchant had offered her, nearly ten years ago. So long ago, and how happy they were then, she reflected. She had been thirty-two, Peter had been only twenty.

She looked at him sitting there, unhealthily pale, and with his usual disgruntled expression. But he was a good-looking man for all that. She wondered why he didn't marry. Money, he would say, of course. But he had already squandered the money his father had left him. Now he expected to live off her. The injustice of it irritated her.

"Peter," she said sharply.

He didn't look up, but he nodded his head a little to acknowledge his name.

"I want to speak to you," she persisted, annoyed with herself for feeling nervous.

"Go ahead!" He still didn't bother to look at her.

"I mean seriously . . . won't you listen to me?"

The face he turned to her was bored, disinterested and uncommonly insolent.

Celia controlled her temper with an effort.

"We can't go on like this," she began.

"Like what?" Peter shrugged. "I'm happy."

"That's just the trouble. You're happy. But nobody else is," Celia snapped. "The place would fall to bits if it were not for Jim. I really don't know what we'd do without him . . ."

"Dear old reliable!" scoffed Peter.

"Oh shut up and listen to me." Her agitation propelled her to his side. She was fast losing her temper. "This business cannot afford to keep both of us, Peter, unless you're prepared to work. Surely you know that. I must plough the money back for repairs and stocking up the cellar. Sometimes I wonder if I am going to be able to meet the wages, and

every time I see a bill on the breakfast table my heart sinks. It just can't go on—"

"Why not? The business kept you and my father. Why can't it keep me?"

"There's no comparison," Celia retorted. "Your father used to *work*. He didn't leave it all to me. I can't put up with it, Peter, I'm telling you. Either you stay here and work, or you get out. I mean it!"

She had his attention now. The look he gave her from his fine blue eyes was long and bitter.

"My father built this business up," he said deliberately. "And it's my father's money you're talking about. You'd still be a wage-slave if it were not for him, a little receptionist ready to jump into bed with the highest bidder—but even that was not for long!"

Her long fingers struck his cheek hard, the nails bit into his flesh. He looked at her unflinchingly, until she looked away.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I had a bad night. My nerves are all on edge. Perhaps I could do with a drink." She went back to the bar and poured herself a brandy. The house was very quiet. Outside she could hear Jim whistling as he swept away the dead leaves from the front path.

"It's alright," said Peter grudgingly. "I was out of line. But my point is that we can't cope with this place without Dad anyway, he just had that knack of running a business. He attracted people, somehow. I don't know why you don't sell up, and let us all have our fair share of the dough. After all the National Trust offered us £30,000. So just guess what we would get on the open market!"

Celia sighed unhappily. "I couldn't sell. I love this place," she said simply.

Peter turned away with an irritable gesture and hid behind the newspaper again.

"It will be yours one day—all of it. You can do what you like then," Celia said, trying to placate him, ashamed that she had lost her temper. "That's in the will. It's mine until I die and then it's yours. I'm not allowed to leave it to anyone but

you—”

“But if you sell,” Peter concluded for her. “Half the profit comes to me, apart from the legacy father bequeathed to the Becketts, and that’s all wrapped up in the business as well. Heaven knows why he made such a complicated arrangement!”

“Because he wanted us to keep the place,” Celia pursued. “As you very well know. He wanted it for *you*.”

“But I haven’t got it, have I?” Peter laid down the newspaper and approached her at the bar. “Another drink please . . .”

“So early in the morning,” she protested, but she took the proffered glass and poured him another whisky just the same. “That’s two-and-six,” she said, holding out her hand. “I always pay for my own drinks.”

“More fool you!” Peter retorted, ignoring her outstretched palm.

“Oh, Peter . . .” Celia passed a tired and trembling hand over her eyes. “If only you would meet me half way . . . if only I could rely on you.”

For a moment a look of sympathy crossed her stepson’s face, but it was quickly replaced by his usual indifference.

“You never will as long as we live here,” he remarked. “You may love the place, I hate it. I was never cut out for the hotel trade. I positively dislike the public, and I don’t want to serve them. Besides, there’s an atmosphere, a kind of damp, decaying atmosphere about the house since Dad died . . .”

Celia looked at him shrewdly. No, he was not joking. He had noticed it too. “Nonsense!” she said crisply.

“Is it? A place as old as this must be haunted,” Peter grinned at her. “Perhaps we ought to advertise the fact, we’d be sure to attract the tourists!”

“I don’t believe in ghosts, and never have,” Celia replied firmly, but she couldn’t meet his eyes. Should she tell him about her bad nights, she wondered, would he understand? “Except . . .” she began.

“Of course you’re right, as always, my dear mother,” Peter

said with an air of finality, turning his back on her, shutting her out. There was no way of reaching him.

All day as she went about her chores, Celia felt depressed. She was tired, and yet she dreaded the night's approach. She drank more than usual that night in the bar, in an effort to induce sleepiness, and when she retired at midnight, she took two sleeping pills instead of her customary one, just to make sure.

She awoke with a start. Downstairs the chiming clock was striking. She counted three strokes and then it stopped. But how long had it been striking before she woke up, she wondered. Not very much because it was still so dark. Perhaps that was it. The chiming of the clock had woken her up. Her nerves were so on edge. That must be it. She wouldn't allow herself to think about any more sinister explanation.

She closed her eyes again, tightly. She must conquer this stupid fear, she wasn't a child to be afraid of the dark. She must stop imagining stupid things. Someone watching her in the shadows—it was too absurd. And then it came again—the noise, and she knew why she had woken up.

The latch on her door was being lifted, and she heard the soft click as it fell back again into its slot. That was it! That was the noise she had heard in her sleep. Someone was outside the door, someone was trying to come in!

Thank God she had locked the door!

She sat up in bed, holding the sheets close round her chin. The attic room which on previous nights had seemed so-hostile and full of secrets was now her haven.

She summoned up her courage and called out, "Who's there?" in a tremulous voice.

There was no answering call. She did not expect it. She knew she should go to the door and open it wide, confront the intruder and demand an explanation.

But she dare not do so. She preferred to keep a locked door between herself and whatever it was out there in the dark passageway. After all, she reasoned, if it were a supernatural being then a locked door would not keep it out, but that was a

thought she did not wish to contemplate.

The noise did not come again. For the rest of the night Celia sat up in bed, struggling against the waves of languor that threatened to close her eyes.

When at last the room was grey with the early morning light, she rose and going to the door, flung it wide. A shaft of morning light playing on the walls of the empty passageway, mocked her. Her night fears seemed very foolish now.

She spent an hour having a leisurely bath and dressing herself.

That morning she was up before anyone, to make the early morning tea and officiate at breakfast. She was glum and withdrawn but the amiable Becketts did not seem to notice.

"I wonder, Jim," she said, when breakfast was over. "If you could go into the town and collect a prescription from my doctor. I am going to give him a ring and ask for some stronger sleeping pills—I keep waking up in the night. It's such a nuisance."

"Of course, Ma'am," said Jim. "I was going in, anyway. Sorry to hear you're not sleeping well."

She wondered whether to tell him. It would be a relief to confide in someone, but it sounded so naïve and absurd in the light of day.

He was smiling at her, but his eyes showed concern. He had such an open, honest expression, the face of a country man, unsophisticated, unspoiled, full of candour. Millie was the same. They were a fine pair. But she couldn't bring herself to confide in him all the same.

"It's nothing," she said rather brusquely. "A passing phase, no doubt . . . I have so much on my mind at the moment."

"I understand, Ma'am," Jim replied sympathetically. "It's a lot of responsibility for one person, this place is."

She nodded, turning away, trying to end the conversation. But Jim was hesitating.

"I was thinking, Ma'am—"

"Yes, Jim?" she was a trifle impatient now, wishing to have done with the subject.

"I was just thinking, Ma'am, it might be better if you had another room," Jim went on, almost apologetically. "After all, the attic room, it's so isolated up there, away from the rest of the house. You could easily have one of the guest rooms, they're far cosier, and it's not as if we were all booked up at the moment."

"I like the attic room," said Celia firmly. "It's always been my room."

"Yes, well . . ." Jim seemed embarrassed about something. "I just thought you might like Mr. Marchant's room now, that's all."

She looked at him sharply.

"No, thank you, I wouldn't," she said.

Checking her grocery order over later that morning, Celia kept returning to the conversation in her head. Was it her imagination or had there been a reproach in Jim's voice, was he like everyone else, curious about her, because she had always maintained her own room? How could Jim, of all people remind her of something she was trying so hard to forget? That awful night when her husband had died.

She could hear it now, the cry he had uttered as he fell, the dreadful thump of his large body on the floor, the running and scurrying from all corners of the house to reach his door, only to find it locked. All the doors were so thick and heavy, the locks so staunch. It had taken two men half an hour to break it down, and by then Frank Marchant was dead.

A sudden, severe heart attack had taken him off, and he had fallen out of bed trying to reach the pills that would save him, the little brown bottle just out of reach of his grasping fingers. The accusing eyes had turned to her, his wife, if only they had shared their bed, like normal people, he might still have been alive.

Even the coroner expressed the opinion, with regret, that had someone been present to help him he may well have survived the attack.

The accusing eyes had followed her, the heads to shake, the tongues to wag. It was her business and her business alone.

She had been very fond of her husband, but the physical union had been repulsive to her, so much so that she had insisted on a separate room shortly after their marriage, and Frank because he loved her, had indulged this fancy.

Ah, there was the guilt! She knew it if she would only face it. It was the guilt that robbed her of her sleep, as she had robbed her husband of the pleasure they might have found together.

When Jim returned he had brought her some veritable bombs to lull her into unconsciousness that night.

"These should do the trick," he chuckled, handing her the large bottle of green capsules. "Knock out drops!"

"As long as they don't give me a hangover," Celia murmured.

She was dreading nightfall. She was dreading going to bed, the darkness closing in on her, the invisible eyes all around the bed, the door latch lifting.

So she drank a little too much, and staggered to bed at midnight in a state of near somnambulance, took a little green bomb and immediately fell into a deep sleep.

She awoke in a sweat of fear. The clock in the hall below was striking four, the eyes were around the bed, and the latch was being rattled, loudly and impatiently, up and down, up and down . . .

She tried to scream but the sound stuck in her throat. She was powerless to save herself. Whatever it was would force its way in, she was sure of it. Something on the other side of that door meant harm to her. And the more she thought about it the more convinced she became that it was him. Yet not Frank as she knew him, but some dreadful thing from the other side of the grave, with Frank's large, powerful frame and big, plethoric face, with Frank's hairy hands, and long, stout arms. He would bound in with his hands outstretched, those very hands she had seen on the night he died, grasping in his death throes, for the pills that would save his life, for the bottle that was just out of reach.

The bottle. Where was it? Her bottle, her bottle of green

bombs. They would save her. They could take her off right away. She would cheat the fiend who sought her death. She would anticipate it. Then what harm could he do her? Her mere body might remain, but her mind would have gone for ever. She would find sweet oblivion at last.

She sobbed a little in her throat at the thought of dying, but increased activity on the latch strengthened her resolve. She reached out with a trembling hand and emptied all the green bombs into her hand. Then with her other hand she found the glass of water she kept by her bedside, and took the capsules gradually a few at a time, until the bottle was empty.

She lay back contented. Let him come now. Nobody could reach her. At last she had captured the perfect sleep. She closed her eyes and drifted away on a dark, soft cloud, smiling to herself, sinking peacefully. And as she did so the frantic rattling on the latch stopped abruptly.

It surprised everyone the way Peter Marchant took the sad news of his stepmother's death. After all, he had made no secret of his dislike for her. Yet when they found her that morning, quite dead, he had actually wept.

It was Millie and Jim who arranged the funeral and who kept the business running somehow. It was Jim who supported him at the Inquest when he had to give evidence, and Jim who sustained him through the next two weeks.

Then suddenly he seemed to snap out of it, and came downstairs one morning quite early, whistling and looking cheerful.

They had no guests and Peter sat in the large, cold, dining-room all alone, waiting for his breakfast to be served.

He greeted Jim cheerfully, when he entered with the customary tea and toast on a silver tray.

"What do you think I've decided, old boy!" he said brightly.

"To put the house on the market, I imagine, sir," Jim replied immediately.

"Not a bit of it, old lad. I'm going to keep the place, make a go of it. I think I owe it to the old man, and to Celia too for that matter. Yes, I think that's what they'd want me to do. What's more, I've got some very good ideas in store as well.

A riding stable—what do you think of that? That's what we need here, some purpose for people to stay here, besides just being in the country—they can come and ride." He looked at Jim triumphantly, expecting enthusiasm.

Jim had difficulty in concealing his disappointment. "I thought you hated the hotel trade," he remarked.

"So did I," laughed Peter. "But it's different now I'm the boss. It's a challenge to make the old place pay. We'll do it, between us—you'll stay, of course."

"Well, sir," said Jim, a trifle bitterly. "If I ever want to realise my legacy from Mr Marchant, senior, I have to stay."

"Ah well, don't worry about that," replied Peter gaily. "You won't have to wait for me to die. Once I make a go of this place, you can take your share, if you like, and blow. And if you want to stay, well, I might make a partner of you one day—what do you think of that?"

"Very generous," Jim murmured, though without much delight.

As soon as he joined his wife in the kitchen she could tell at a glance that he was displeased.

"What's up?" she asked anxiously. "We'll get our share, won't we? He's surely going to sell."

"Not he," said Jim savagely. "Not he! He's going to stay and make a go of it . . . another one in our road, Millie, another one . . ." and the look he shot his wife was full of fury.

That night Peter Marchant retired to bed contented for the first time in weeks. He was at peace with himself at last. He hadn't been a very good son, and he'd been a worse stepson but he'd make up to them both, even though they were dead. He'd make up to them now.

He slept well in the large, old attic room, unperturbed by the fact that so recently his stepmother had died in the very same bed. He slept very well, until the early hours of the morning, when he awoke with a sudden shock of surprise and fear.

He felt sure, uncannily convinced, that in the darkness round the bed, someone was watching him.

"A WORK OF ART"

PAT WINSHIP

Every day this obsession became worse.

IN THE bathroom lived the rubber tree plant. Mrs Dumble had bought it when it was only twenty-four inches high, in a little brown plastic pot. It had then stood on a small corner table between the airing cupboard and the window. Religiously, every week, Mrs Dumble had watered it, and once or twice a year had given it a few drops of bottled fertilizer.

In those days, her son Cyril was living at home and he had eventually christened the plant Algernon, after his father, whose ship had passed in the night while Mrs Dumble was still a Miss, and had unfortunately passed in the day too, forever, it turned out, before anyone could be aware of Cyril's inconvenient (if ecstatic) entry into this world.

"There's a lovely big boy, Algernon," Cyril would say as he shaved first thing in the morning; and it was Cyril who repotted Algernon first into a large earthenware pot, and, finally, when he was too large for the table and had to stand on the floor, into a large polythene bucket with the handle removed.

Now Cyril had taken a job in the city, and Mrs Dumble was all alone, but she never felt all alone, because always there was Algernon.

The steam in the bathroom and the weekly milk and water bathing of his dark green leaves had made Algernon into a handsome plant, and now it was Mrs Dumble who had long daily conversations with him.

She especially liked his weekly once over with the milk and water. She would lovingly stroke each leaf with a milk soaked pad of cotton wool in a way that made them both tremble with delight! Indeed, after a while Mrs Dumble began to imagine she could hear Algernon rustling and trembling his leaves as she mounted the stairs each week bearing his toiletry equipment, and a shiver of delighted anticipation would go

through her ample frame. So much so that she would stand a little on the stairs to savour the delight still further!

One day Cyril made a rare visit to his mother as she mounted the stairs on Algernon's "Day".

"Oh hello love," she said. "How grand to see you. I'm just going to give Algernon his bath.

"Let me do it," said Cyril. "It's a long time since I had a word with the old chap," and taking the bowl of milk and water and pad of cottonwool he entered the bathroom.

Hard on his heels came his mother.

"No, no! " Let me, let me! " she insisted.

The pleading note in her voice quite took Cyril by surprise.

"Why?" he asked, mildly amused.

"Because he likes me to, he likes me to," she said in anguish.

"He doesn't like anybody else to touch him. It wouldn't be nice! " and taking the bowl back firmly, she pushed her son out of the room.

"That's rummy," thought Cyril. "Poor old girl's going off her rocker. Perhaps I ought to come home more often."

He went into the kitchen to make the tea and by the time the kettle was boiling and he had the tray set with the rose china cups and saucers and some of his mother's home made cake, he was thinking: "What does it matter as long as the old dear's happy."

Mrs Dumble came downstairs in a happy dream. Today, for the first time ever, as she stood close to Algernon, gently caressing his lower leaves, the two leaves level with her ears had bent forward, one at each side of her head and she had thought she had heard a far away voice. She was sure it was the voice of her long ago lover, but of course she had only imagined it, she told herself.

On entering the living room and seeing the tea tray laid all ready with one of her best tray cloths and the china with the rosebuds on she exclaimed:

"Oh Cyril, thank you. If that doesn't look nice! "

She was so pleased indeed at this unexpected treat that she almost confided in Cyril about Algernon's strange behaviour.

However, looking at her son's solid matter of fact form, the pleasant smiling face, she thought better of it. He was happy because he'd pleased her and she realised that to tell him of her fancies would distress him. He would only think she was going a bit mental. No, better to keep things secret between herself and Algernon. Perhaps she *had* imagined it after all, what with the shock of seeing Cyril after all this time, and being lonely after Mr Dumble's death a few months ago.

Mr Dumble had been a kindly man, a lot older than herself. He had married her when Cyril was a schoolboy and they'd had a contented life together, but she had never felt the wild excitement with her husband that she had experienced with sailor Algernon. He had died the previous winter through an accident in the bathroom. She always kept a small electric fire in the bedroom for dressing by on chilly mornings. This day being particularly cold, she had taken it into the bathroom to warm her while she gave the rubber tree its going over with milk and water. She couldn't carry everything out of the room at once so she had left the fire, meaning to remove it later, and had forgotten it. Mr Dumble, having his bath that night must have switched it on, and what with the steam and everything and it being such a small room, had received a fatal shock. She was so upset at the time and blamed herself but she couldn't understand him switching it on, when he was always warning her not to do that very thing! Ah well! Mrs Dumble pushed the unhappy thoughts away and concentrated on having a nice chat with Cyril.

The next morning as Mrs Dumble was cleaning her teeth, she had a sudden uncontrollable urge to go and stand beside Algernon. Immediately she did so, the two leaves drooped one each side of her head, but not quite touching her and she heard the voice like a sigh through the branches of the trees, but quite distinct: "Oh Mary, my Mary," repeated over and over. It was the voice of her first love, oh yes indeed, now there was no doubt in her mind whatever!

The rest of the day passed as though in a dream. She realised now that she had been drawn to caress Algernon as though he

were human. She had always felt as though he responded to her touch and now she knew why. The plant must contain the spirit of her lover. Yet she did not believe in spirits, and certainly the lively Algernon would have laughed the idea to scorn. The more she thought about it the more bewildered she became. What could be the explanation?

Every day the obsession became worse. More and more often she would find herself leaving off in the middle of some household chore to climb the stairs to the bathroom, answering some insistent silent call within herself.

Always she went unhesitatingly and unafraid to stand beside Algernon and always there was the whispered cry, aching with longing, seeming to come through the very pores of the leaves beside her ears. The call coming poignantly across the years, "Mary, oh my Mary."

Then she would slowly return to her neglected housework like a woman in a dream, always waiting subconsciously for the next irresistible summons. Meals were sketchy affairs prepared and eaten in an absent minded way, constantly interrupted by the urge to go to Algernon.

Like a dog that answers to a whistle so high pitched that the human ear does not hear it, so answered Mrs Dumble to the call of Algernon.

About a month after his previous visit, Cyril came to see his mother again. He was appalled at the change in her, and asked for leave of absence from his firm in order to look after her.

She was hollow cheeked and dark under her eyes now, and though still amply built, her neck seemed longer and thinner than before through lack of food, and the whole house had an air of neglect that had never been in evidence.

His mother's repeated visits to the bathroom puzzled him enormously. At first he thought it was probably due to her illness, but his natural delicacy of feeling forbade him to comment on it. After some days however, feeling very dishonourable, but too anxious about his mother's health to remain in ignorance any longer, he eavesdropped at the bathroom door.

He had already tried to persuade his Mother to visit a doctor

as she was losing weight visibly, but she hardly seemed to hear him. Indeed, she was so vague in every way now that he feared for her sanity.

Listening there outside the door, he suddenly became aware of the voice his mother constantly heard. "Oh Mary, my Mary", over and over in such a tone of yearning and melancholy that he would have burst into the room, his kind heart touched beyond bearing, to see what comfort he could render.

Before he could actually get his hand to the door knob however, the voice changed, and seemed to be in his own head rather than on the other side of the door. With hair-raising venom the words came quite clearly to him.

"We don't want *him*."

The sheer cold hatred in the voice had Cyril bolting down the stairs so fast that he wasn't even aware of having moved until he found himself panting in the kitchen, the words still clear and cold inside his brain.

"We don't want *him*."

When Mrs Dumble came downstairs, she found her son standing firmly in the living room door barring her entrance.

"Now mother," he said as she tried vaguely to pass him. Indeed she hardly seemed to see him at all these days, so pre-occupied was she with thoughts of Algernon. "Now Mother, don't try to avoid me, I want to talk to you seriously now. Whatever is going on in that bathroom? I heard voices. A man's voice in fact. Now either I'm going crazy or there's something going on you don't want me to know about—but I insist on knowing, because whatever it is, it's making you ill!"

Mrs Dumble smiled sweetly at him and in an irritatingly vague manner said:

"It's only Algernon lovey, only Algernon, and after all he's one of the family by now."

Cyril could hardly believe his ears.

"Only Algernon? Talking? Mother I think you *have* gone crazy! You're coming with me this evening to see Dr Foster."

But even as he spoke the smile receded from Mrs Dumble's face and was replaced by a sullen look of hatred, quite shock-

ing to him, and chilling his spine, the voice again spoke in his brain, the loathing in it so obvious that he felt physically sick.

"We don't want *him*."

Who could ever have believed that such a simple phrase could be fashioned into a weapon of fear that would make the mouth turn dry and the hairs prickle on the nape of the neck!

The rest of the day passed as in a nightmare. Mrs Dumble constantly visited the bathroom, but whereas before, Cyril's only thoughts had been worried concern as to the state of his parent's digestive system, now, every time she closed the door behind her the blood freezing voice would sound in his brain, so numbing him with fear that he was incapable of either speech or action. He could only stand frozen until his mother returned when he was only too glad to sink into a chair and rest his clammy forehead on his hand while his heart palpitated.

All this seemed to have no effect whatever on Mrs Dumble who carried on as unconcernedly as usual with her constantly interrupted household chores.

By the time bedtime came, Cyril had neither the will nor the energy to make coherent plans for future action, but just lay in bed completely exhausted and though he tried to sleep he could not, for every nerve was alert with terror.

Mercifully as the night wore on he dozed and began to relax. Then he began to tell himself that he must have been over-doing things at the office and worrying too much about his mother. It was obviously preying on his mind and playing havoc with his nerves. He himself would visit Dr Foster and explain his hallucinations. He would also persuade him to come and visit his beloved but stubborn old mother to discover the cause of her loss of weight and her lack of interest in the usual bustling activity she had hitherto enjoyed.

Having reached this conclusion, Cyril settled down in bed, much refreshed now that he had planned a positive course of action, and fell happily and deeply asleep.

Along the landing came a shuffling, bumping noise, not very audible on the carpet, but a noise just the same.

Shuffle . . . bump . . . shuffle . . . bump, slowly it came nearer to the sleeping Cyril's door. A stealthy noise, but oddly familiar, like someone rolling a tub on its edge . . . shuffle, then setting it down for a rest . . . bump. Then repeating the movement over and over.

"Oh my God, my God!" Cyril was awake now, dreadfully awake, bolt upright in bed—staring with bulging eyes at the doorway. The doorway, where, in the faint light from the street lamps outside could be seen a six foot tall rubber tree plant seemingly full of menace, all aquiver with menace, its dark green leaves gleaming poisonously where the weak rays of the street lamp caught the milk polished sheen, and they were raised, yes raised and pointing threateningly towards the demented Cyril shrinking back as far as he could on the bed!

"Mother, oh Mother!" he screamed then. As the child Cyril had screamed so long ago when waking from a nightmare—but never one like this. Miraculously through the cloudiness of Mrs Dumble's vague mind came the instant response of a mother to the cry of her child in terror and pain.

"Coming Cyril, oh coming dear" . . . and the dreadful vision in the doorway was replaced by the familiar, rational and inexpressibly comforting figure of his mother.

"Algernon was here, Algernon was here," he panted, tears of terror running down his cheeks. He pointed to the doorway.

"Standing there, he was standing there." Not daring to look!

"There, there, it's all right now, mother's here." The age old words to soothe a frightened child brought him back to commonsense.

"Of course, I had a nightmare. What a relief. I seem to have Algernon on the brain lately. Go back to bed mother, I'm sorry to have got you up when you're not at all well yourself."

"I'm a fine one to stay at home to look after you. It seems I'm the one who needs looking after."

"Don't worry dear. I won't let Algernon hurt you," said Mrs Dumble.

Panic again swept over Cyril at this odd remark and looking intently into his mother's face for reassurance, he was

alarmed to notice the greenish pallor on her once plump and rosy face. Was she not also getting so thin or was it the pale light and his exhaustion combined that made her seem to wave over him rather than bend. Too tired to think it all out, he closed his eyes as she placed her cool hand on his hot perspiring forehead. She continued to speak soothingly to him and he began to drift off again into a state of happy drowsiness.

His mother's hand felt cool and smooth upon his brow.

"Like a leaf," he thought drowsily. "A big, shiny smooth leaf."

"LIKE A LEAF!" He shot up in bed again. Wide awake now! As he tried to cry out, a large green leaf came across his mouth and the strength behind it bore him down, down, back upon the bed.

The milkman and the newsboy reported that at Mrs Dumble's house the milk and the papers were mounting up, and they had had no notification that she was to be away on holiday. Indeed, they understood that her son from the city was staying with her.

When the police broke into the house, they were astonished to find Mrs Dumble's son Cyril dead in bed. Death was evidently due to suffocation but how?

Of Mrs Dumble there was no sign whatever, except her cold, crumpled bed. Evidently she had got up some days previously and just disappeared.

As they searched the house, the police sergeant said to the constable:

"Never would have thought of having a rubber tree plant in the bathroom, but I suppose the steam and warmth makes it an ideal spot for them."

"Yes sergeant," said the constable.

"But did you ever see *two* rubber tree plants growing together in one pot like that? Look how the alternate leaves reach round each others stems for support! "

"Remarkable!" said the sergeant.

"Quite a work of art that. Yes. A real work of art."

WINDFALL

JAMES PATTINSON

But it had not been clever to leave a fingerprint on the safe.

TAPPER BATES stepped out through the wicket and sniffed the air. It was a dull, chilly day, the sky overcast and threatening rain, but it looked good to Bates. After nearly five years inside, any day would have looked good.

The prison officer nodded affably before shutting the wicket. "Behave yourself, Tapper. Don't let's be having you back too soon."

Bates grinned. "I'll be as good as gold."

He was a small, neat man, thirty-five years old, with receding hair and concave cheeks. He was known as Tapper because, whenever he was thinking out a problem, he had a habit of tapping his left cheekbone with two fingers of his left hand. His real name was Albert, but he preferred Tapper.

They were waiting for him, just as he had expected: Kent and Proctor; sitting in a black saloon car, smoking cigarettes and watching.

Bates, brown paper parcel under his arm, wearing the blue suit that was a shade too tight, was in half a mind to walk straight past; but he knew he couldn't get rid of those two as easily as that.

Proctor slid the window down. "Hello, Tapper. How goes it?"

Bates stopped. "Hello, Harry. Hello, Joker."

Kent was known as Joker because he liked playing jokes on people, like leaving trip-wires at the top of stairs and tickling the soles of feet when their owners were tied to beds. For a man who had such a liking for jokes, he looked very sad; in fact he looked about as cheerful as a sick bloodhound. He had that kind of face.

"We've been waiting for you, Tapper."

"That's nice."

Proctor reached back and opened the rear door. "Get in." He was fat and seemed a little out of breath.

Bates shook his head. "Not today, thanks. I've got business." "The business is with us."

"I don't think so. That business was finished years ago."

"Not to our way of thinking."

Bates wondered whether they would try to force him into the car. He didn't think so. There was a police car standing not fifty yards away.

"Goodbye, Harry. Goodbye, Joker. Been nice seeing you."

Proctor looked angry. Kent merely looked sad. "You'll be seeing us again, Tapper. Soon."

A blue Mini drew in to the kerb between the black saloon and the police car. Shirley was driving it. She was a well-shaped blonde who could have passed for twenty-five at any reasonable distance. Bates got in beside her and threw the parcel on to the back seat.

"You're late."

"I got held up by the traffic." She gave him a brief kiss and put the car in motion. "What did those two want?"

"They offered to give me a lift."

"They want to know where you hid the doings. They'd give something to know that. They tried to make me talk. I didn't tell them anything."

Bates grinned. "You couldn't, could you? You don't know anything."

"That's what I told them. They said: 'Doesn't he trust you?' 'Tapper doesn't trust nobody,' I said."

"And they believed you?"

She glanced at him momentarily, then back at the road. "They know you."

When he had had a bath and had got into some different clothes he felt better. It was as if he had washed the feel of the prison out of his skin.

It was not a bad little flat. Shirley had got herself a job when he had gone inside. She had had to; he couldn't support

her then. But she had waited for him; oh, yes, she had waited. What girl wouldn't, knowing what there was to come at the end? Twenty thousand pounds was worth a little patience.

She poured a beer for him, cool and frothy. He had forgotten that beer could taste so good. She watched him drinking, a hint of calculation in her eyes.

"When are you going to pick it up?"

He set the glass down empty. "No hurry, Shirl. I'll let you keep for a while. If you don't mind."

"Oh, I don't mind. But why not get it at once? I'd have thought you'd had enough of waiting."

"A few more weeks won't hurt. There'll be quite a number of people watching for me to make a move. Harry and Joker, the coppers. Maybe after a time they'll get tired of watching."

"Well, you know best."

"You bet your sweet life I know best." He put his arm round her waist and drew her close. "When I do get it we'll have a great life, Shirl. I promise you."

He had little difficulty in spotting the tail that the police had put on him. Sometimes it was one man, sometimes another. It amused him to lead them a dance. He looked up one or two pals, called in at a few of the old haunts, idled the time away. Shirley provided the cash. Why shouldn't she? It would all be coming back with interest later.

The one thing he did not do was go near the place where the twenty thousand pounds had been hidden. He would not go there until the day he decided it was safe to pick up the loot.

As he had expected, Kent and Proctor soon got tired of waiting. They came to see him.

They were friendly enough at first. Kent asked how Bates was getting on. "Not short of money, eh, Tapper?"

"I'm managing."

"But you haven't picked up the deposit yet. Well, maybe that's wise. The coppers are sure to be keeping an eye on you. So why don't you tell us where it is and we'll get it for you. Then we can make the three way split and call it quits."

Bates looked steadily at Kent. "Who said anything about splitting it?"

Kent raised his eyebrows and managed to look surprised even if he wasn't. "But that's the way it was agreed. We were all in the job. We all did our share."

Proctor nodded, chins wobbling. "That's right."

"I did the time," Bates said.

Proctor took a cigarette from a silver case and lit it. "That was the way the luck ran."

"You two got away quick."

"We had to, didn't we? No sense in all of us getting nicked."

"So you took the car and left me holding the baby."

"A nice big baby," Kent said. "Beats me how you managed to give them coppers the slip. You gave yourself time to stow the lolly. That was clever."

True enough, Bates thought. But it had not been clever to leave a fingerprint on the safe. It had been a bad slip, that; he had taken off a glove in order to get at his handkerchief because his nose was running, and he must have touched the safe without thinking. That print had been enough to send him down. But not before he had got rid of the loot.

Kent was looking at him. "You're not going to be obstinate, are you, Tapper?"

Bates's eyes were suddenly flinty. "You'll get nothing from me. Nothing."

Kent moved fast. He was behind Bates in a moment; his long right arm hooked round Bates's neck, jerking the head back. Kent had once been a wrestler and he still knew the holds.

"Now tell us where it is, Tapper. Don't make us do it the hard way."

Bates said nothing.

Kent gave Proctor a nod. Proctor sucked at the cigarette, making the end glow red. He pressed the glowing end lightly on Bates's left cheek. Bates gave a cry of pain and struggled to free himself. Kent's grip tightened.

"Now will you tell us?"

Bates did not answer.

Kent sighed. "Again, Joker."

Proctor was about to press the cigarette to Bates's cheek a second time when the door opened and Shirley came in. She halted just inside the room and took in the situation at a glance.

"You can stop that and get out. Both of you."

Kent retained his grip on Bates. "Shut the door, sister. You can watch the fun."

She did not move. "There's a copper outside. Do you want me to call him?"

Proctor looked at her and at the doorway. It was easy to guess that he was calculating his chances of catching her.

She gave him a mocking glance. "Forget it. You're carrying too much weight. Now are you going?"

Kent relaxed his grip. "Okay. You win this time. But we'll be around."

He walked towards the door, Proctor following. Shirley went out first, keeping at a safe distance from the two men. She watched them go down the stairs, then went back into the flat and locked the door.

"You have nice friends."

Bates wetted a finger and pressed it to the burn on his cheek. "Lucky you came when you did. I must be more careful. They play it dirty."

"For twenty grand who doesn't play dirty?"

It was a month later, a little before ten in the evening, when Bates let himself out of the flat. He was carrying a small spade wrapped up with brown paper and string, and he was wearing a gabardine jacket and cord trousers. In his pocket he had an electric torch.

He felt pretty certain that the police were no longer tailing him, and he had seen nothing of Kent and Proctor for days. They had made a few more approaches, but he had been too wary to let them catch him off guard again. Perhaps they had given up too; but he doubted it.

He caught a bus and travelled for about a mile before alight-

ing in a residential district. He took a quick look round in the light of the street-lamps to make sure that he was not being followed, then began to walk. He came to a small park and skirted it, following the railings.

He was beginning to feel excited as he drew nearer to his goal. On the far side of the park he knew that he would come to some allotments, many of them no longer worked, grown over with weeds and disfigured by abandoned and rotting sheds. It was behind one of these sheds, screened by a tangle of neglected raspberry canes, that Bates had buried the leather case which contained his treasure—twenty thousand pounds in tens and fives and ones; all good, usable money.

The picture of the place had been so constantly in his mind during the long years of his imprisonment that he felt he could almost have found it blindfold. Yet even before he had reached the end of the park he had a feeling that something was wrong. There were lights where there should have been no lights, reaching up into the sky. He knew what they were: the windows of a block of flats. But five years ago there had been no flats.

He went on a little further and then stopped, crushed by the realisation of what had happened. The allotments had gone; they were obliterated, buried under thousands of tons of concrete and steel. It was no longer possible to see the smallest trace of their former existence; no huts, no raspberry canes, no weeds; only this monstrous structure that had sprung up to deny him access to his hard-earned money.

Tapper Bates held on to a lamp standard for support and began to weep.

At about the same time a gentleman named Walter Smith was sitting in an armchair and watching television. The chair was an expensive one and the television set was a brand new colour model. Walter Smith had been able to afford luxuries such as these ever since he had had his little windfall, which was how he always referred to it in conversation with his wife, even though it was very far from being little.

Mr Smith, who operated a mechanical excavator for a living, had had the good luck to dig up the so-called windfall when no one else was watching. Some old allotments were being prepared to take the foundations of a new block of flats, and the leather case suddenly appeared in the scoop of the excavator as though by magic.

Mr Smith took the case home and found that it contained a fortune. He immediately concluded that providence had ordained that he should have the money and that it would be downright sinful to reject the gift. His wife agreed wholeheartedly with this opinion.

Mr Smith stayed on at his job. As he said, there was no reason to give that up, and to do so would only cause unwelcome gossip. But it was pleasant to know that whenever you really wanted something there was a nice little pile of notes ready to pay for it. Next year he and the wife planned to take a holiday abroad; Italy or Spain; somewhere in the sun. Maybe he'd buy a new car and take that along too. You could do so much when you had money.



THE HARD WAY OUT

JOHN EMERSON

Illustrated by Buster

Zimov saw through a red haze the legs of the men who had hit him.

GEORGE ZIMOV paced the floor restlessly. It was midnight. The room was dark except for the light from the street lamp outside. On the wall a huge portrait of Chairman Huzek stared down into the darkness. The furniture of the room was luxurious but ugly. The sort reserved for high officials of the party.

As Zimov passed the window his expression showed the conflict taking place inside him. He had the face of a man trained to command and obey. A long blue scar ran across his forehead and into the greying hair.

Every day when Zimov looked in the mirror to shave, that scar reminded him he had been a coalminer before he had known what communism was. When he was still a black-faced boy pushing a coal truck in the Solkarti mines he had gained that scar. Before the Germans. Before the Russians. Before a socialist dream had turned into a communist nightmare.

His clenched hands were battered too. Not only from years of cruel labour. The twisted flesh where the fingernails should have been was the work of the Gestapo.

Suddenly Zimov stopped. He turned and looked up at the portrait of his leader. He forced the trace of a smile. Then, decisively, he walked towards the door. Zimov had decided to escape to the West.

Before he had gone three paces a stream of light poured in from the adjoining room. A woman in evening dress stood in the doorway. It was Helga and she was drunk.

Zimov's wife was young. Much younger than her husband, and good-looking too. Not beautiful. Her features were too

heavy for beauty and her eyes had the self-indulgent look of a selfish tart.

When she saw Zimov she placed her hand unsteadily against the door frame.

"You're not going anywhere, George," she hissed savagely. "You're going to pay for tonight and all the other times you've humiliated me."

"Helga," Zimov replied, calmly. "You humiliate yourself."

"Why did you leave the reception without me?" she snarled. "Everyone was laughing at me behind my back. They all knew you had just walked out and left me."

"Don't be coy, Helga. You arrived at the Presidential Palace with me but you spent the evening with one of our Russian guests. When you began your usual tour of the palace, I left. You should be careful, my dear. Colonel Alexander Kelek of the People's Secret Police looked a trifle jealous, I thought. But then, in the unlikely event of his remaining your lover as long as I have been your husband he will learn to accept your little failings."

Helga was startled. For a moment her anger was overcome by surprise. "You knew all the time," she said, slurring her words tipsily.

"About Kelek? Of course. A man doesn't go from the coal-face to the central committee of the party without knowing a good deal more than who is his wife's lover. Of course, Helga, about you there was always the danger of my information being out of date. You kept me on my toes."

His wife lurched drunkenly towards him, her long fingernails clawing for his face. Zimov grasped her wrists firmly and held her at arms length. She spat at him venomously.

"I'm glad you know. That's why I'm here, to tell you how much I have always hated you, before they come to take you away."

"Go to bed, Helga. Im going out."

"Going out?" she screamed, wrenching herself free of his grip and rushing to the window. "Look out there. Look! Do you see them? Police! They are there to arrest you. The house

is surrounded. You'll be going out all right but you'll never be coming back. In one hours' time they will bundle you into a car and take you to secret police headquarters. Then, in a few days' time, when they have finished with you, they'll bury your carcass where no one will ever find it. You'll never be heard of again."

Helga stood by the window, staring wildly at her husband as he walked slowly towards her. Her heavy breathing was broken by occasional convulsive sobs.

Two seconds was long enough for Zimov to see that his wife was telling the truth. The gleam of a large black car was visible through the trees. A small group of men was standing nearby. As he was watching, one of them turned and stared at the house.

"There's no escape," Helga sneered. "Your confession is already typed. Plotting with imperialist agents to overthrow the regime. That's what they're going to make you say. There won't be a trial. Just a bullet in the neck if you're lucky."

Helga rushed from the room.

Zimov listened to her laughing and crying hysterically as she stumbled down the stairs. He heard the front door slam and watched her from the window as she ran down the drive and into the street. A tall, well built man, who Zimov recognised as Kelek appeared before her and she rushed towards him. He led her away from the house and out of sight.

Zimov turned from the window. He ran his trembling hands through his hair and for a few moments gave himself up to uncontrollable fear. His whole body shook and he seemed about to fall to his knees. He stared around the room like a trapped animal.

After a while he looked at his hands. The battered fingers reminded him of the last time he had felt such fear, a quarter of a century ago when he had been a prisoner of the Gestapo.

His face became calm.

One hour.

One hour before they came.



Zimov saw through a red haze the legs of the men who had hit him. As if from far off he heard the splintering of wood and the crashing of glass as other men ransacked the house.

Again they punched him savagely before they frogmarched him outside.

Ten minutes later he was in an interrogation room at secret police headquarters.

The questions began.

Who were his contacts? Which countries did they work for? What information had he given them? Every time he refused to answer he was beaten about the arms and head with truncheons.

For two hours the interrogation continued.

Zimov awoke from a spell of unconsciousness to find himself sitting in a chair. Kelek was standing a few feet away. A heavy steel box was on the table beside him.

"Zimov," Kelek said, pointing to the box. "You will recognise this. We found it at your home. I wish to know the combination of the lock."

Zimov said nothing. The room seemed about to turn over. He was waiting for it to happen. Willing it to happen. It seemed to him that Kelek was using his heavy, well-dressed

body deliberately to hold it down. He could see the man's mouth moving but couldn't hear the words.

Kelek was dressed as he remembered him at dinner. The scarlet tie, the carnation in the buttonhole, even the little drops of water sprinkled on the petals of the flower to keep it fresh, sparkling in the bright unshaded light, were the same as they had been a few hours ago. The idea seemed to Zimov both obvious and impossible.

"I will make you tell me in the end," Kelek said. "Better to save yourself the pain. If you tell me the numbers for this lock I will stop your interrogation and let you sleep."

"I can't remember."

Zimov had said the words involuntarily. He had learned that when he said, "I can't remember," instead of "No, it's not true," sometimes they didn't hit him.

"Try to remember. Would you like my men to help you? I could have the box cut open with a torch but I might damage what is inside. I'm sure the contents are interesting. The names of your contacts perhaps."

Kelek waited for a moment. Then losing patience he signalled for the torture to continue.

Kelek's words suddenly all arrived at Zimov's brain together, like the rapid banging of buffers as a train is shunted to a halt.

"Wait," he shouted hoarsely. "I remember now."

"That's better," Kelek said.

The room had stopped moving and Zimov recollected clearly the events of the last few hours. He said:

"I will tell you only if we are alone."

Kelek became red in the face. "Tell me now," he screamed.

"It will be much better if we are alone."

Kelek's expression changed from fury to one of caution. He thought for a few moments, then said:

"Don't try anything, Zimov. I am armed. My men will be outside."

"Look at me, Kelek. After two hours in here how could I harm you?"

The colonel motioned his men outside.

"Now," he said as the door closed and they were alone. "The combination."

As Zimov slowly recited the numbers, Kelek turned the cylinders of the lock.

"Excellent," he beamed as the last tumbler fell. "I wonder what we have inside." He drummed his fingers on the lid of the box and laughed. "Supposing there really is some incriminating evidence in here. How useful that would be. Forced confessions are so chancy. The subject sometimes shows surprising stubbornness. But then you know that already, don't you. The Gestapo entertained you for a while during the occupation. Still, we have moved on a lot since then. You will find our methods very different."

"So far they are surprisingly similar."

"Just the softening up process. The next stage is very scientific."

Kelek lifted the lid of the box and brought out a slim brown envelope.

"Is this all?" he said, looking at Zimov. "It must be important to have a big box all to itself."

He opened the envelope and took from it a single typewritten sheet of white paper. As he started to read his hand moved slowly to his throat. The flesh of his neck reddened and bulged out over his clean white collar. Zimov, watching from the chair, saw him clutch the table to steady himself. He stared at Zimov then lifted the paper and read it again intently, devouring every word. His mouth opened and closed noiselessly as he tried to speak.

"This list of names," he said at last in a terrified whisper. "My name is among them. The Russians are going to kill me."

"I'm sure now, I was right to suggest your men leave the room."

"But it's a mistake, a terrible mistake." Kelek's voice rose to a scream.

The door opened and one of the interrogators looked in.

"Get out, you fool," Kelek roared.

The door closed quickly and Kelek looked with bewilderment at his prisoner.

"Zimov," he pleaded, "you must tell them. They trust you. I should never have arrested you. Even Chairman Huzek thought it was too soon. It was your wife, your own wife, who persuaded me."

"Poor Helga," Zimov said, "To lose both a husband and a lover in so short a time."

"Blast your wife. She can look after herself. Look, George. Let's forget what happened tonight. I'll release you. We'll go to the Russians together."

"They won't take any notice."

"But Zimov. I'm innocent," Kelek said despairingly.

Zimov's eyes closed as sleep and pain began to overcome him.

"How many times have you heard that said in this room?" He laughed wearily. "Innocent or guilty; it's irrelevant." His words turned to a groan and he slumped forward in the chair.

"Wake up," Kelek shouted, grabbing Zimov by the shoulders and shaking him violently. "You can't go to sleep now. You must help me."

Zimov opened his eyes. He ran his tongue over his bruised lips.

"Run, Kelek," he said. "It's the only way."

"You mean—" Kelek looked round furtively at the door before he uttered in a low voice the supreme heresy, "to the West."

"Where else?"

"But I would never make it. The border is sealed. No one can get out."

"There are ways."

Kelek walked quickly to the door, locked it and ran back to where Zimov was sitting.

"You mean you know a way?" Kelek asked excitedly.

Zimov nodded.

"Tell me, Zimov. Tell me," Kelek said.

"What happens to me?"

"We'll go together."

Zimov pondered for a few seconds. Then:

"All right," he said. "I suppose we must trust one another. We'll need a car for the first stage."

"Leave that to me. Can you walk?"

"I think so."

Zimov rose slowly to his feet. His arms felt like knotted rope and his head ached. He limped to the basin in the corner of the room and washed the blood from his face.

"That's right, Zimov," said Kelek, watching anxiously. "You'll soon be feeling better. My boys haven't done you much harm. It would take more than a few taps about the body to break you, Zimov."

Zimov grimaced as he dabbed the towel against a large open cut on his cheek.

"I'm sure they didn't mean any harm, Kelek. Only obeying orders as the Nazis used to say when they gave us the treatment."

Kelek laughed nervously and unlocked the door.

Before dawn the two men stepped to the safety of the West at a remote river crossing. As they trudged wearily up to the police station in the small town a few miles across the border Kelek broke the silence which had existed between them for some hours.

"I still can't understand why they should want to get rid of me. Surely they knew I was utterly loyal. Why should my name be on that list?"

They entered the police station and Zimov started to laugh quietly. Kelek spoke to the policeman at the desk and Zimov's laughter grew louder. An inspector came out followed by a sergeant and Zimov was still laughing. He looked at the man who had arrested him only hours before.

"Yes, Kelek, they knew you were loyal. You were loyal but stupid. You allowed Helga to have her revenge on me by telling me I was to be arrested in one hour. That was foolish, Kelek. An hour was quite long enough for me to type that list."

OUT OF THE PAST

J. M. M'INTYRE

Trent caught a brief glimpse of the white, scared face of the driver and wondered what on earth was wrong with the man.

TRENT FELT tired, very tired. His head throbbed painfully and his arms felt sluggish. He drove slowly over the crest of the hill and down the long road into the valley. On either side harvested fields swept emptily to the horizon.

There had been something odd about his reactions all day. Even changing gear, as he had come over the hill, had been an effort.

And now, as he let the car freewheel down the valley road, he felt again the strange spasm of weakness that had puzzled and worried him earlier.

His hands fumbled at the gear lever as finally he stopped the car and awkwardly pulled on the hand-brake. He sat quite still for a moment, bent forward, his head resting wearily on the wheel. Then opening the car door he climbed out.

There was a gentle slope at the side of the road and he stretched himself gratefully on the grass. For a long moment he gazed blankly into the sky, then his eyes closed and a long, weary sigh, shuddered from his chest. His body seemed suddenly, strangely, empty. The quiet of the surrounding countryside soothed him. And he slept.

Trent was suddenly wide awake. He sat up, his senses curiously alert. There was still an odd buzzing in his head, but the headache, thank God, had gone.

He rose and stretched. He must have badly needed sleep to have slept so soundly. The thought staggered him, as he realised that he must have slept for over eighteen hours.

It had been late afternoon when he had dropped off and now

the sun was high again and uncomfortably hot.

In some inexplicable way during sleep he had slid to the bottom of the slope. And now, as he pulled himself free from the clinging branches of the hedge, he wondered at how steep the slope seemed to have become.

Stiffly he clambered up it to the road, and for a moment stared in unbelieving astonishment—his car had gone. Then he became aware of another startling disclosure, he was dressed in rags. The pair of shoes on his feet were rotting from them.

Someone had exchanged clothes with him during sleep and had made off with his car. He had never been more outraged in his life.

He looked around for help but the road was deserted. Far down the road, about a mile away, he judged, he saw the faint white outline of a building.

"Could be a garage or an inn," he murmured, and was startled by the harsh quality of his voice.

Unthinkingly, he turned and began to walk, stumbling frequently, down the road towards the building. He hadn't been walking for many minutes before a car appeared driving swiftly uphill. But within a hundred yards of him it suddenly swung round in an awkward turn and made off at high speed back the way it had come.

Trent caught a brief glimpse of the white, scared face of the driver, and wondered what on earth was wrong with the man.

The building he had noticed from far up the hill took on now, as he approached it, the contours of a farm house. He hurried towards it. It seemed a pleasant place, small and cool and white in the sun.

But as he drew nearer he was aware of a sickly-sweet smell, offensive in the hot sun. It was repugnant, and grew stronger every moment. It made him pause a little but, since he so badly needed help, he went on.

He saw someone, a woman he imagined, at an upstairs window, then fancied he heard a hoarse kind of a scream. A big farm dog appeared from behind an outhouse and came bounding, barking warningly, towards him.

But suddenly its barking ceased, and it slithered to a halt, seeming to shrink as it did so. Then with a sudden howl of terror it turned, its tail between its legs, and ignominiously fled.

The disgusting smell was overpowering now and Trent felt nauseated by it—but still he went on.

He paused at the farm house door and knocked loudly. But no one came. He tried again, and again getting no reply, he walked around the house to the back door.

The door was slightly open but on an inside safety chain. The muzzle of a shot gun protruded through the opening and a voice hoarse with fear said, "For God's sake, mister. Move on."

Behind the door Trent could hear the harsh sobbing of a frightened woman, mingled with the plaintive crying of a baby.

He shook his head as he turned away. The world seemed to have gone utterly and weirdly mad. He went back to the road and began trudging along its empty, undulating length.

He must have walked a further two miles without once seeing a house or vehicle of any kind. The heat was getting at him. Thirst tormented him, and a huge host of flies buzzed mercilessly and continuously over his head.

He was beginning to despair when he saw it, and a feeling of relief swept over him. It was only a small filling station; but it was like an oasis in the wilderness.

Even as he trudged wearily up to it a small, wizened man, wearing oil-stained overalls appeared yawning. He took one incredulous look at Trent who was only a few yards away from him, then he turned and ran towards a parked station wagon.

The next moment, gears screeching protestingly, the wagon swung out of the station, and shot dementedly down the road in a cloud of dust.

For a moment Trent stared after him, then, with a shrug, he stepped into the tiny office the little man had just vacated.

There was an ancient phone there, and, better still, a pot of coffee on a hot plate.

The first cup had an immediate effect on him. It was like a full meal after years of hunger. The second cup was even better—then he reached for the phone.

There was no dial on it, and he had to crank impatiently until a petulant female voice gave a grudging, "Yes?"

Trent gave the number he wanted, and waited.

He had almost given up and was about to crank again when a male voice said, "Yes?"

"My name's Trent," he began immediately. "I'd like to speak to my wife."

"No one by that name here." The man sounded surprised and a little irritable.

"But there must be."

"Look mister," the voice was surly now. "I've worked here for the past two years. I assure you, there's no Trent here. Male or female."

"That is Melville Broadway, isn't it?"

"That's right."

"Phone number, 49541?"

"Yes."

And that was that. He could get no more help from the man. Yet his wife had worked in the office at that address for 10 years. It was just another of the day's mysteries.

He replaced the phone and stared at it for a moment. Then, with a reluctant sigh he lifted it again.

"Police," he said bluntly, and heard the sharp intake of the operator's breath at the word.

The officer who answered listened patiently then suggested, "Perhaps you'd better come in to the station, sir. You could give us corroborating details then."

"Right, thanks," then as an afterthought, Trent explained what had happened when he'd arrived at the filling station.

The officer on the phone laughed, "Yeah, that's Charlie all right. He's a silly old coot." There was a short pause, then, "You'll probably get a lift in, sir, I'll see you then."

Trent had another coffee and waited. The nauseating smell had now permeated the office, and reluctantly he went outside.

Two or three cars drove up—but as soon as they saw Trent the drivers jammed their accelerators down hard and the cars shot away.

Finally, disgusted with his futile attempts to get a lift, Trent climbed aboard the station's break-down truck. It was, as the policeman he had phoned, had assured him, all of twenty miles into town. And he certainly wasn't going to walk all the way.

It was a pleasure to be behind a wheel again and he was quite enjoying driving the old truck when, halfway into town, an old tramp flagged him down.

Trent braked and the old chap, eyes wrinkled against the sun glare, climbed rheumatically aboard. He seemed chirpy enough and he chattered away amiably. Once or twice however he complained of the smell.

Finally he fumbled for an old pair of wire-rimmed glasses and putting them on stared myopically at Trent. He then gave a sort of choked yell and jumped straight out of the truck. Luckily for him there was a thick hedge at the roadside that helped to partially break his fall.

Trent had automatically braked; but when the tramp picked himself up and went on running, he shrugged and drove on. He had seen so many strange actions that day that none of them now disturbed him.

It was dusk before he finally reached the city having lost his way twice. Eventually he found the police station and, parking the wagon, he went in.

A cheery, round-faced sergeant looked up as Trent entered. He stared, then he swallowed, hard, his face going suddenly pale.

Trent saw the knuckles of the sergeant's hands whiten against the edge of his desk. And he noticed also, with a sudden flare of annoyance, the disgust and horror in the man's eyes.

But as suddenly as it had come, Trent felt the anger fade, and an overwhelming sense of fear take its place.

"Yes, sir?" Even as he spoke the sergeant had whipped out a startlingly white handkerchief and was holding it over his

mouth and nose.

"What can we do for you?" and Trent knew that the sergeant was fighting off a bout of nausea.

A dull flush of unreasoning anger swept over Trent. What was wrong with these people? Why did they all act as though they were seeing a frightful ghost?

One would think he was suffering from some appallingly vile skin disease.

And then there was that nauseating sickly-sweet smell that hung about him all the time . . . It probably came from some obnoxious weed he had fallen asleep on . . .

The sergeant was still staring at him, but now he looked angry.

"This isn't some kind of a joke, is it?" he asked, his voice angrily hoarse and muffled by the handkerchief.

But before Trent could even begin to explain a police inspector appeared.

"What in hell's name is that disgusting smell, sarge?" he began. And then he stopped and gasped when he saw Trent.

"My God," he breathed.

"Amen," said the sergeant.

Trent stared back at them wild eyed. Then he blinked his eyes several times. For some reason they were beginning to lose focus.

"No, it's no joke," he said, bitterly harsh. And for some strange reason he wanted suddenly to shriek out loud.

The inspector stared at Trent, then, as though suddenly startlingly aware of something for the first time, he said, "Have you had a look at yourself, man?"

Dumbly Trent shook his head.

"Then for God's sake do so," and he jerked his thumb in the direction of a mirror further down the office.

It was then that Trent learned the full horror of his appearance.

The flesh of the face that stared back at him was a mottled greyish green mass of shredding flesh. The eyes so deep sunken as to seem non-existent. It was a face out of a nightmare. His

was the body of a decaying cadaver.

With a scream of terror he turned and ran. Plunging madly down the street to the truck. A few moments later he was driving recklessly out of town towards the distant hills. Behind him already he heard the scream of the police sirens.

He drove the truck until the petrol ran out, and then he abandoned it and set out on foot deep into the hills.

He knew they were following him. But he had to get to his wife first. He would explain to her, and she would understand.

She'd explain to them that he was an Egyptologist. Just home after a year digging among the tombs of the Valley of the Kings.

Then he remembered that elixir that he had sampled. He had sneered at the terrifying prophecy on the scroll. He had found the paste in an ancient jar in the coffin of the High Priest of the Temple of Amrak.

They had recoiled in horror at the time at the thing they had found inside the coffin. They had lifted the stone lid of the sarcophagus, then the lid of lead. They had stared in awe at the richly carved golden lid that fitted exactly over the lid of black African oak. And then they had uncovered the body of the Priest of Amrak.

The body had lain untouched for over 5,000 years—yet its flesh was as fresh as the day it had first been laid in its tomb.

The dish containing the elixir had been placed in the coffin beside the body. And again he remembered the malignant glare of the priest's dark eyes when he had lifted the jar . . .

He stumbled on in the dark, the smell that had surrounded him all day even more overpowering now. Behind him he could hear the first baying of hounds.

They were coming he knew, with dogs and with guns. They would come shouting and crowding together to hide their fear. Because to them he was a monster.

But he'd trick them yet. He'd get to his wife. She'd care for him. She wouldn't mind the decaying flesh and the dreadful odour. Resolutely he plunged on.

Trent never knew when it had happened. It was quick, mer-

cifully quick. They found what was left of him at the foot of the cliff he had plunged over.

They had followed him easily with the dogs. But could almost have done so without them, for the smell of his decaying flesh was everywhere.

Even the tough, hardy old police surgeon had felt sick when he viewed the remains.

"This man's been dead for at least five years," he'd snapped. "I thought you said he just died?"

Nor would he give any credence to what the police inspector told him not even when the sergeant confirmed it.

"You're wasting my time," he'd growled, and walked rapidly away.

The wallet they found in the tattered clothes helped them eventually trace Trent's wife. But when the inspector went to see her she told him he must be mistaken.

"You see, Inspector," she had said. "My husband died of a heart attack in a tomb he was uncovering in Egypt."

"And when was this?" the inspector asked.

"Oh, some five years ago."

"Then you have never seen him since?"

"Of course not, Inspector," and there was a pitying look in her eyes.

"His colleagues in Egypt buried him there the day after he died. They had to. You know how quickly the human body deteriorates out there . . . ?"



NOTHING MUCH HAPPENED TODAY

ANTONY BOWL

Sybil will be a rich woman one day

NOTHING much happened today. I suppose it is inevitable that when you get to my age (sixty-five next birthday!) the days become somewhat monotonous but, of course, I'm still pretty active and I try to fill in my time as best I can—like writing this diary for instance. It's nice to sit in bed, propped up with pillows, waiting for the ten o'clock news. Come to think of it I don't suppose I shall bother to turn the wireless on: the world is such a dangerous and miserable place today and I like to revel in my own comfort and security.

The trouble is that I feel such a drag on Sybil. Being much younger than me she naturally wants to go out a lot whereas I like to potter about the garden and read the papers. Still, she's been a good wife and never complains. Lately, if anything, she's been even more attentive than usual and I have to remind her not to coddle me. So there's two things I have to be grateful for: an attractive wife and never a day's illness.

Now, let's see what I did today. First of all, at Sybil's suggestion, I changed a bulb in one of the verandah lights. There are two lights on the wall there and I don't need a step-ladder to reach them. They are a few feet apart and connected in series so that one switch operates both. I made quite sure that the switch was off before I took the old bulb out. Apart from the fact that I'm really scared of electricity, 240 volts wouldn't do me any good at my age. It was while I was fiddling with the loose socket that I got a bit of a fright.

The other light went on.

Obviously, I couldn't have been touching anything because I didn't get a shock. Sybil explained what I was doing and closed the switch "just to test it". She's been doing lots of odd jobs

around the house of late, trying to save me the bother. Thoughtful Sybil!—she does her best but it's not really a woman's job so it's no wonder she makes mistakes. I've often told her that we ought to employ a full-time handyman—the house is too big for the two of us with only the one maid.

At about eleven o'clock it turned chilly so Sybil and I sat in the lounge by the fire and went through my stocks, bonds and insurance policies. Sybil is a practical woman and takes an interest in my investments. I always think that both husband and wife should be equally involved with the financial aspect of a marriage. Sybil will be a rich woman one day and it is sensible of her to acquaint herself with various aspects of money. Still, that day is a long way off.

Anyway, I had to get some more coal from the cellar. (The maid was off on some errand to the shops.) It could have been a nasty accident. As I stepped on to the first step with the scuttle, I felt something tug at my ankles. Heaven knows what it was—it felt like a piece of wire or something that the maid had left there carelessly. There are twenty-two stone steps down to the cellar and I thought I was going to feel all of them. It was the scuttle that saved me. I instinctively pushed it out in front of me and it struck the wall, pushing me back to some extent. I fell heavily—that'll teach me to go on a diet!—and only received a couple of bruises.

When I got up, Sybil was standing in the doorway. I looked everywhere but couldn't find what had tripped me. I had probably knocked whatever it was down the steps when I fell. Sybil was furious and threatened to fire Edna but good maids are hard to come by so I dissuaded her.

Bill Goodwin came for lunch. Possibly because of my consistently good health, I never cared much for doctors but Bill is a decent chap. He insists on coming round each day to see how we are, as he puts it. I should have thought it would be rather a bother but I suppose as he lives only next door, it is little trouble. It must be nice to have plenty of work to do despite the fact that he's always on call for some poor suffering soul. Strange that he hasn't married. He can't be more than

thirty-five and with his dashing good looks, brand-new Rover and busy practice, one would have thought he'd be a catch for any girl. That's his affair though.

As we ate our roast pork—my favourite dish—I couldn't help noticing that Sybil had never looked better. She chatted away and really seemed on top of the world. Bill has obviously done her a lot of good. She has some "woman's trouble" and goes to Bill's surgery about twice a week for a check-up. She makes a point of going late in the evening to avoid having to wait for other patients in the waiting-room. This is very convenient as I catch up on my correspondence when she's out.

After lunch, I went upstairs for my afternoon rest. Sybil insists on this and I must say that I usually drift off quite quickly as, indeed, I did today. Sybil had lit the gasfire and the warmth, coupled with the pleasing contrast of a dull world outside the window, soon sent me to sleep.

Luckily, the beating of heavy rain on the roof woke me up shortly afterwards. There was a strong smell of gas although not enough to worry about. No need to break any windows or anything but I really am glad about that rain! That's the trouble with gasfires; if the supply is cut, if only for a few moments, it can be very dangerous. However, the gas people must have restored it fairly quickly because I had to turn it off. I had a bit of a coughing fit but that was all. Sybil had gone shopping and it was Edna's afternoon off so I sat in the lounge.

Sybil didn't get back until about five. When I opened the door for her she seemed a little pale. I asked her what was wrong and she explained about this feminine complaint. I think another visit to Bill Goodwin is called for.

She perked up a bit in the evening and suggested an early night. So here I am!

That's better. Writing is almost as thirsty work as talking. Sybil has just brought in my cocoa. She really isn't herself today—it's not like her to burn the milk. Very bitter indeed.

My interrupted afternoon nap must have caught up on me because I'm really very tired now. Sybil will be up soon.

I hope she doesn't forget to draw the curtains.



CROOKS IN BOOKS

A review of some recent mystery and detective books

"WHO SAW HER DIE?", by Patricia Moyes (*Collins, Ltd.*, 25s. or £1.25).

This latest thriller from Miss Moyes is sure to establish itself quickly with her thousands of fans as one of her best.

Crystal Balaclava, once a leading socialite and now approaching her seventieth birthday, is afraid for her life. When she throws a small family party to celebrate her birthday, she talks Scotland Yard into providing her with a personal body-guard: Chief Superintendent Henry Tibbett.

Tibbett is sceptical about pandering to the whims of aged gentlefolk, but to his horror sees Crystal poisoned before his eyes.

There are plenty of suspects, and motives abound. But was it murder? Tibbett's enquiries take him all over Europe before he can know the truth.

Every once in a while, a murder-mystery comes up with a truly original idea. This is one of those books—informed, highly readable and with a totally unexpected denouement.

"THE DEADLY GREEN", by John Rossiter (*Cassell & Company Ltd.*, 25s.).

Substituting chopped-up newspaper for green bills worth a million dollars is a quick way for an absconding Civil Servant to become rich. But such a mouth-

Ellis Peters

The Knocker on Death's Door

An exciting and classical whodunnit with surprise twists and developments, and an extraordinary finale. 25s

Winter's Crimes 2

Edited by George Hardinge

Completely new crime stories specially written for the occasion: Eric Ambler, Christianna Brand, Ivor Drummond, James Eastwood, Elizabeth Ferrars, Jonathan George, Val Gielgud, Winston Graham, H.R.F. Keating, Laurence Meynell. 25s

Tony Hillerman

The Blessing Way

Set in a Red Indian Reservation, an amazing and unusual first novel. "What a rare and splendid book it is" — John Creasey. 25s

Yseult Bridges

Saint — with Red Hands ?

The Constance Kent case

Poison and Adelaide Bartlett

Two Studies in Crime

The cases of Lord William Wallace and Julia Wallace

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Reissues of these four famous and classic crime studies. All 30s

Michael Underwood

Shem's Demise

An exciting and completely ingenious story by this outstanding crime novelist.

"Nobody is quite what they seem and there are complicated and quite convincing developments"

Maurice Richardson, *The Observer* 28s

Macmillan

watering sum purchases more than luxury; it buys also hatred and causes murder. Amongst all this Roger Tallis, sent by the British Government after man and money, moves under the brilliant blue sky of a South American playboy's paradise. But there are also hot, sinister alleys and steaming, muddy water in which cannibal fish tear at human flesh.

The writing style is punchy; an air crash is described with a verbal impact equal to that with which the plane smashes into the ground. Characters too are forcefully presented, from evil Lopez, huge and swarthy, to Mary Sibold who is buttery smooth-skinned and plumply young. The hardware is dramatic and ranges from knives and guns to a super-car with a moon-rocket multiplicity of dashboard dials. The exotic local scenes are vividly described.

Rossiter writes yet another book with the vigour, expertise and experience of his life as a former Detective Chief Superintendent.

"FREEZE THY BLOOD LESS COLDLY", by John Wainwright (*Macmillan & Co. Ltd.*, 25s.).

Men of jazz music, men of murder and men motivated by

justice form a bizarre triangle of human conflict. In a wild Yorkshire blizzard car-crash the jazzmen tangle with a ruthless wage-snatch gang on the run. Forced as hostages at gun point into an isolated farmhouse the musicians are trapped with the crooks by bitter ice and snow and they live side by side while tensions explode into hatred and passion. A giant of a farmer with a body crippled in a wheelchair but an iron will forms an eerie third party. Meanwhile the local police work expertly and relentlessly to effect both a rescue and a capture.

The story is strong meat and not for the too sensitive. Against the background harshness of nature and the aspirations and efforts of the musicians, the evil of the criminals and the quiet, sometimes everyday but inexorable work of the police are presented in an atmosphere of constant suspense and complete conviction.

"A HOST FOR DYING," by Pierre Audemars (*John Long*, 23s.).

Four men in succession leave Paris in their cars taking the N7 route to the South. A judge, a diamond merchant, a chainstore tycoon and a film producer; each

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BLES

is rich and each disappears completely and mysteriously. Then M. Pinaud, famous detective, offers himself as the next victim.

A Pinaud story is like a play with the stage occupied successfully by villains and voluptuous girls both good and wicked with the hero, Pinaud himself, always there and the delightful humour of the author's writing ranging from smile-arousing wit to guffaw-causing comedy. But constantly too there are thrills and excitement and the mood changes from light to dark in a couple of sentences. The story holds the reader equally whether Pinaud is battling with crooks for his life or with his chief for the cost of cleaning his best suit and seven bottles of fine old local wine entered on his expense account.

Matching the appeal of the characters is that of the background, particularly medieval-but-modernised Sancerre. Its sunlit lake and sinister shadowed castle overlooking it from a high rock merge as harmoniously as the author's delightful mixture of tense action and smooth humour.

"THE AIRLINE PIRATES", by John Gardner (*Hodder & Stoughton*, 28s. or £1.40).

The new Boysie Oakes adventure, featuring that reluctant "liquidator" of old.

This time we meet Boysie just as he is realizing that he is not as young as he used to be, and that his financial reserves are dwindling fast.

His old adversary Mostyn pops up out of the past and offers Boysie a five-figure salary. His new job: organizing and running illegal charter flights to South Africa.

But this is not all. Soon Boysie is involved in a gun-running plot, air hijacks, three deliciously sexy air-hostesses, and he finds that someone is out for his life.

John Gardner writes reliably well, and this book is no exception. The plot crackles like new cellophane through the pages, and is nothing if not utterly topical. Fast, funny and escapist, this is bound to be a best seller.

"THE MAN FROM NOWHERE," by Joan Fleming (*Hamish Hamilton*, 30s.).

Rockamble has been roaming the world. Then he arrives in a village peaceful until Ma Perkins, battered to death and robbed, is found—and by him. Then the villagers begin to murmur about the birthmark disfiguring his face and its similarity to the Mark of Cain. Bad enough but soon after another villager is found by "Rock" after he has

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committed suicide. Or has he?

This story of sinister happenings and of ominous human reaction to them is skilfully told with the suspense and menace of one blended into the normal rural placidity of the other. There are clearly-drawn and entertaining cameo descriptions of the village folk. Of blonde Clancey Ash and the minister who have been courting each other for ten years and may even get engaged soon; of the dwarf cobbler, a wizard with his piccolo, and because of his shop notice WE MEND 'EM known as Wee Mendum. Of the village policeman who becomes the Sleuth of Stargill and Mr. Packer who keeps the pub. There is romance too but this follows the hazardous path of the plot itself.

In all an intriguing mixture of calm and storm in the country.

"ITEM 7", by Alan Nixon (*Bodley Head*, 30s. or £1.50).

This fast-paced, well-written novel is set in Rome, where an international criminal elite, Imaginative Crime Ltd., put into action a complex and ingenious plan known as Item 7. Just for hors d'oeuvre, this begins with a million-dollar jewel theft.

Nothing is what it seems, how-

ever, and this is only the first step in an audacious secondary plot, the true aim of which is only revealed in the last pages of the book.

One of the novel's most attractive features is its downbeat, football-loving hero Larry Maver, an Interpol agent sent from London to unravel the mystery. Maver falls into the hands of the lovely but sadistic Vera (and falls in for some of her bizarre erotic pastimes as well) and escapes to become involved in the final piece of double-dealing with the criminals.

Maver is a creation to rank alongside Len Deighton's laconic, anonymous hero, and Alan Nixon (whose first thriller this is) must surely be a writer to watch.

"GREAT BIG LAUGHING HANNAH", by Ward Rutherford (*Geoffrey Bles*, 25s. or £1.25).

A strange and intriguing title from Ward Rutherford, whose first novel, *The Gallows Set*, will be remembered by many readers.

The Laughing Hannah of the title is one of those weird machines sometimes seen at fairs that laugh, and laugh, and laugh . . . But it is also the name of the night-club that Bryan Curwen is taken to by an American client,

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JOHN LONG



and which seems to be central in a web of intrigue surrounding a murder mystery. And suspect no. 1 is Bryan Curwen.

At first seeing himself as a hapless innocent, Curwen learns the hard way (losing his wife and suffering a heart-attack in the process) that no one can be uninvolved in murder.

The dramatic suspense the author weaves is excellent, but the book suffers from a confusion of characters and an overall familiarity of tone.

"THE LAST MAN'S HEAD", by Jessica Anderson (*Macmillan*, 25s. or £1.25).

This is a good and serious novel about police-work in Australia, and one which raises several moral questions regarding the nature of crime, and the responsibility of the citizen and law-enforcement officer towards his own conscience.

It concerns Alec Probyn, an Australian policeman, who believes instinctively that his wife's half-brother is psychopathic, and guilty of a murder for which someone else has already been convicted. As his investigations are complicated by resentment among the various witnesses, and by the fact that he has been suspended temporarily from duty, Probyn cannot resolve the

question by regular police methods, and is forced in the end to take an arbitrary step himself.

Miss Anderson's book gives an unusual insight into the work of a police force which is very different from our own, and the result is a rewarding and thought-provoking read.

"THE JERSEY PLUNDER", by John Chancellor (*Cassell*, 30s. or £1.50).

The plan had all the attractiveness of pure simplicity. Milk the Channel Island of Jersey of all its spare cash, and do it painlessly, bloodlessly and with the minimum of danger. And, by heck, they get away with it... in one sense.

This then is the story of Franklin and his crony Runshek committing the sort of crime the reader always has a sneaking desire to see come off. It's daringly conceived (whoever heard of exploding sea-gulls, for Heaven's sake?) and brilliantly carried out.

The author has the happy knack of conveying to the reader his enthusiasm for his ideas, and it is this panache which makes the book so enjoyable. Thoroughly recommended as a novel, and in case there're any film-producers in the house, it would make a *marvellous* film.

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